

# The Secrets of the Single Sword

*Henri de Saint Didier, 1573*

*Translated by [Chris Slee](#)<sup>1</sup>, 2013*

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# Introduction

## Preface

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This is a translation of the section of the text concerning stepping and proper footwork. Please direct any comments and questions on either the translation or the fencing techniques described to me on the email address above or at my blog<sup>2</sup>.

## The Text

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There are a number of copies of the text but only two are publicly available. The first is the copy in the Bibliotheque Nationale de France (BNF) available through [Google Books](#)<sup>3</sup>. The second is located in the Library of the city of Blois and is available through the [Bibliotheque Virtuelles Humanistes](#)<sup>4</sup> (BVH).

The translation is based on the [transcription of the BVH copy](#)<sup>5</sup> made in 2010 by Olivier Depuis for [l'Association pour la Recherche et le Développement des Arts Martiaux Historiques Européens](#)<sup>6</sup>. All amendments to the text made in the transcription have been assumed and are not noted here.

## Translation

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I must say first off that I am not a professional translator. I could not be considered fluent in French but I'm told by native speakers that I do read it and write it quite well. I have a DELF B1 certification and a passion for Renaissance literature. I say this only so that the reader will not be lured into thinking that my translation is in any way authoritative. However, it is, I believe, the best English translation of this portion of Saint Didier's book available at the present time.

I am also an historical fencer specialising in the sidesword techniques of the late sixteenth century, the very weapon used in Saint Didier's text. I believe that this practical experience has given me insights into the text that would not be available to other translators.

As for the text itself, Saint Didier's prose has all the signs of a man trying to emulate those better educated than him. This is not an improbable interpretation since he claims himself to be both minor gentry and a professional soldier of 25 years' service. His phrasing is often impossible to figure out because he tends to nest subordinate clauses many levels deep to the extent that it becomes difficult to determine which subject a particular verb refers to. Unfortunately, the worse offending passages are the same ones in which he seems to be

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2 <http://sleech.info>

3 <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=mh0WAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Henry+de+Saint+Didier>

4 <http://www.bvh.univ-tours.fr/Consult/index.asp?numfiche=259>

5 [http://ardamhe.free.fr/biblio/Saint\\_Didier\\_Transcription\\_1.1.pdf](http://ardamhe.free.fr/biblio/Saint_Didier_Transcription_1.1.pdf)

6 <http://ardamhe.free.fr/>

stating his main points. Because of this, the translation is in some place not as strict as I would have liked and some juggling of word order has been called for.

Here is the list of technical terms and how I have rendered them in the translation:

- *plan* outline or instructions
- *tenue* comportment or posture
- [\*desmarcher\*](#)<sup>7</sup> in larger terms it means to halt but in terms of this manuscript it mean to step or to set down one's foot
- [\*desgainement\*](#)<sup>8</sup> drawing the sword from the scabbard as discussed in the first entry here
- [\*braye\*](#)<sup>9</sup> pants, trousers

I've translated the literal French "putting the sword to the fist" as "drawing the sword".

The only significant alteration I have made is dropping in translation the profusion of "said," "above-mentioned," "here-above said", etc, from the text. They are intrusive and add nothing to either the meaning of the text or to show Saint Didier's writing style.

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7 <http://artflx.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dicos//pubdico1look.pl?strippedhw=desmarcher>

8 <http://artflx.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dicos/pubdico1look.pl?strippedhw=Gaine>

9 [http://atilf.atilf.fr/scripts/dmfX.exe?LEM=BRAIE1;MENU=menu\\_dmf;ISIS=isis\\_dmf2012.txt;OUVRIR\\_MENU=2;s=s050036f8;LANGUE=FR;XMODE=STELLA;FERMER;AFFICHAGE=1](http://atilf.atilf.fr/scripts/dmfX.exe?LEM=BRAIE1;MENU=menu_dmf;ISIS=isis_dmf2012.txt;OUVRIR_MENU=2;s=s050036f8;LANGUE=FR;XMODE=STELLA;FERMER;AFFICHAGE=1)

# The Secrets of the Single Sword

## Triangle and Quadrangle

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Here is shown the guard and posture for making two good and subtle strikes in the form of a triangle and a quadrangle for the attacking Lieutenant against the defending Provost.



And in order to do this, this current Lieutenant, having made one of the three drawings (of the sword), with its proper stance<sup>10</sup> is stood on the left foot which is placed and put<sup>11</sup> on the footprint of the triangle noted with number 1 and is in middle guard, situating the point of the sword directly at the left breast of the Provost, holding the left hand on the left hip, as noted above with number 61 behind the hat in the illustration.

And if he is left-handed, he should hold his right foot on the triangle if he wants to properly execute and make the first strike, as will be shown hereafter, and will hold himself in the same guard if he is attacking as noted with number 61 in this illustration of the right-handed Lieutenant.

Thus the end (of the) guard and posture for the Lieutenant in order to execute the triangle against the defending Provost.

Here follows the declaration, guard and posture of the triangle for the defending Provost.

And in order to do this, the next Provost should be on the left foot, holding this foot on the corner of the triangle which is noted number 1 in this illustration, having made of of the drawings (of the sword) with its own proper stance and is stood in high guard, holding the top of the sword hand upwards, situating the point of the sword directly at the left eye of the Lieutenant and (holding) the left hand directly before his breast ready to turn away the point of the sword of the attacking Lieutenant as is figured above in the illustration noted with number 62.

The end of the guard and stance for the defending Provost.

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<sup>10</sup> *avec sa desmarche a ce propres*

<sup>11</sup> *pausé*

Here follows what he should do in order to execute a very good and subtle strike against the defending Provost. The attacking Lieutenant imagines a triangle on the ground which they both have under their feet in order to do it<sup>12</sup> well.<sup>13</sup>



And in order to start well, this Lieutenant will advance the right foot which he holds behind, in the illustration noted with number 61, on the footprint near the corner of the triangle noted with number 2, and throw a thrust to the face of the Provost, holding the fingers of the sword hand upwards and the left hand directly before the face, as is shown clearly<sup>14</sup> here in this illustration of the Lieutenant noted with number 63.

Thus, how the Lieutenant, who will serve to show, must throw a thrust in order to start to do this triangle.

Here follows how the Provost must defend himself from the thrust thrown by the Lieutenant on the figure in the form of a triangle.

And in order to do this, <sup>15</sup>having made the stance, guard and position<sup>16</sup> made in this illustration noted with number 62, this Provost threw the left foot behind and puts it on the footprint which is or must be noted with number 2 and this Provost crossed the sword coming in on a thrust thrown by the Lieutenant, the strong on the weak, which is explained in several places, both the strikes and the oppositions and follow-ups, turning the fingers of the sword hand upwards and threatening a thrust to the face of the Lieutenant, holding the left hand directly before and above the thigh, as is here above in the illustration noted with number 64.

Thus the end of the first strike and beginning of the defence that the Lieutenant will throw against the Provost.

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12 ie: the strike

13 This para is torturous in the original with two phrases intermixed and intertwined.

14 *apertement*

15 Repeated subject deleted

16 *assituation*

And for the first opposition and follow-up of the triangle for the attacking Lieutenant against the defending Provost, the Lieutenant makes a thrust or renvers from above.



In order to properly do this first opposition and follow-up, the Lieutenant, who should have the left foot on the footprint of the triangle which is noted in the illustrations with number 1, will advance the right foot on the footprint which is noted, or should be, with number 3, and pass the point of the sword underneath the guard of the Provost's sword, having made and thrown for this first opposition and follow-up the above-said strike and thrown a thrust from above on the right-hand side of the Provost, holding the fingers of the sword hand downwards and the left hand directly before the breast as is shown in this illustration noted with number 65.

The end of the first opposition and follow-up of the triangle for the attacking Lieutenant against the defending Provost.

Here follows the defence of the first opposition and follow-up for the Provost against the Lieutenant.

And in order to do this, the Provost should, watching the point of the Lieutenant's sword, when it passes underneath the guard of his sword in order to throw to him<sup>17</sup> a thrust from above or renvers, at the Lieutenant's choice, given that he is attacking and for the protection<sup>18</sup> of this first opposition and follow-up of this triangle, made by the Lieutenant, it is required that the Provost cross the Lieutenant's sword, the strong on the weak, being on the right foot, threatening a thrust to the face of the Lieutenant, holding the top of the sword hand upwards and the left hand directly before the breast as is shown above in the illustration noted with number 66.

Thus the end and defence of the first opposition of the triangle for the Provost.

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17 ie: the Provost

18 *la conservation*

Here follows the second opposition and follow-up, which is a thrust or maindroit from above, resulting from<sup>19</sup> the strike of the triangle for the attacking Lieutenant against the defending Provost.



And again<sup>20</sup> for this second opposition of the triangle, if the Lieutenant sees that the Provost may be defended of this first opposition, made and thrown on the backhand by the Provost as is noted with number 66, and that he may be skilful<sup>21</sup>, this current Lieutenant, being stood in the same stance of the right foot, will steal his sword underneath the guard of the Provost's sword by a backhand and will pretend<sup>22</sup> to throw a backhand to the thigh of the Provost, lifting in the same instant his sword upwards and in order to execute this second opposition will cross the Provost's sword, strong to weak, and threaten him with a thrust to the body or face, changing the right foot, which is on the corner of the triangle noted with number 3, and putting it on the footprint noted with 2, holding the fingers of the sword hand upwards and the left hand directly before the face as is shown in the illustration noted with number 67 behind the hat.

The the end for the Lieutenant against the Provost.

Here follows the counter<sup>23</sup> for the second opposition and follow-up for the Provost.

And in order to do this, the Provost should be on the left foot having made his stance, as said above in the figures of the three drawings (of the sword) noted with numbers 2 and 4 and as is also shown above in the illustration of the Provost, 62. And in order to properly guard himself from this strike thrown by the Lieutenant, in the form and manner of a triangle, the Provost should watch closely<sup>24</sup> the point of the Lieutenant's sword and never lose it from view and when the Lieutenant advances his right foot in order to throw a thrust or renvers from above, this current Provost should cross these strikes, strong on weak, and threaten him with a thrust to the face, as is shown above in this illustration noted with number 64. And in order to do and execute this second opposition for this Provost, he will

<sup>19</sup> *provenant*

<sup>20</sup> Repeated subject deleted

<sup>21</sup> *adroit*

<sup>22</sup> *faire semblant*

<sup>23</sup> *contraire*

<sup>24</sup> *bien* = well?

be on the right foot and cross the thrust coming on the left side<sup>25</sup> that the Lieutenant will have thrown, strong on weak, holding the fingers of the sword hand upwards threatening a thrust to the Lieutenant's face and the Provost will hold his left hand directly before his pants as in noted here above with number 68.

Thus the end and defence of the strike for the Provost.

Posture and guard of the first strike in order to execute and make the quadrangle for the Lieutenant and Provost.



It should be well noted that in order to do and execute this quadrangle for the Lieutenant, he should have the left foot on the corner of the quadrangle noted with number 1, having made one of the three drawings (of the sword) with its stance, and this guard should be middlingly<sup>26</sup> low, the edge of the sword downwards and the point of the sword directly (at) the stomach, holding the left hand directly before the belly, as is shown above in the illustration noted with number 69.

The end of the guard and posture for the Lieutenant in order to start, do and execute the quadrangle against the defending Provost.

The definition, guard and posture for the defending Provost in order to guard himself and to defend from the quadrangle thrown by the attacking Lieutenant against the defending Provost.

And in order to do this, the Provost should be on the left foot, of which this foot will be put on the footprint which is noted with number 1 in his quadrangle, being in medium guard having made his stance, drawing (the sword) as said above in several places, holding the guard of the top of the sword hand upwards and by consequence the fingers of this hand downwards, and the left hand on his left hip, as is shown above in his illustration and figure noted with number 70.

Hereafter will be shown a very good strike for the attacking Lieutenant and for the defending Provost in the form of a quadrangle and all that which it is required to know by the Lieutenants and Provosts and by consequence all other supporters<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> *moyennement*

<sup>27</sup> *suppots* – other members of the salle, perhaps?

The first strike and follow-up of the quadrangle for the Lieutenant and Provost.



And in order to do it well, it is needed for the first strike that the Lieutenant, having made one of the drawings (of the sword), stand on the left foot, which is on the footprint noted with number 1. In order to execute this strike this Lieutenant should advance the right foot on the footprint which is noted with number 2, and throw a quick and strong<sup>28</sup> thrust from above, holding the fingers of the sword hand upwards and the left hand on the right hip as is shown above in his illustration noted with number 71 behind the hat.

Thus how the Lieutenant should start to do this strike in the form of a quadrangle, pretending it thus to be (drawn) on the earth.

Here follows how the Provost should defend himself from this strike, made and thrown by the Lieutenant, pretending and drawing a quadrangle in the earth, such as this one above.

And in order to do this, the Provost should be on the left foot, as is shown and said above in the first posture. And in order to defend this strike properly, made as said in a quadrangle, by the Lieutenant on a thrust or maindroit from above, the Provost will throw the left foot from the footprint which is noted with number 3 and will cross the Lieutenant's sword, strong on weak, turning away the maindroit or thrust thrown in a quadrangle by the Lieutenant, as was said, the Provost threatening a thrust directly to the Lieutenant's left eye and holding the fingers of the sword hand upwards and the left hand directly before his pants as is shown above in the illustration of the Provost noted with number 72.

Thus that which the Provost must do in order to defend himself from the quadrangle thrown by the attacking Lieutenant.

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28 *Roide* carries both meaning strongly

The first opposition and follow-up of the quadrangle for the Lieutenant and Provost.



And in order to continue to execute this first opposition or follow-up of the quadrangle for the Lieutenant, it is again needed that he make a follow-up, seeing that the Provost has been skilful and not ignorant, understanding that he<sup>29</sup> has defended himself well. For this reason, the Lieutenant must steal his sword underneath the guard of the Provost's sword and put the left foot on the footprint which is noted with number 3, passing a maindroit, throwing the body a little to the rear and raising the right foot from the place where was noted with number 2.

Just as it is shown above in his illustration noted with number 73 behind the hat.

Thus that which the Lieutenant must again do for the first opposition as is required for this first strike of the quadrangle.

Here follows the defence of this first opposition and follow-up of this quadrangle for the defending Provost against the attacking Lieutenant.

And in order to do this, the Provost should be on the left foot on the corner of his triangle which is noted with number 1 and the right foot on the footprint which is also noted with number 2. And for the defence of this first follow-up, the Provost, being on the right foot, has crossed the Lieutenant's sword, strong on weak, and threatens him with a thrust to the face, holding the top of the sword hand upwards, and holding the left hand directly before the breast as is shown here above in his illustration and figure noted with number 74.

Thus that which the Provost must do in order to guard himself from this opposition which the Lieutenant threw just now.

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29 ie: the Provost

Here follows the completion<sup>30</sup> of the quadrangle which is a maindroit or thrust from above thrown by the Lieutenant against the Provost.



In order to properly complete this quadrangle for the Lieutenant against the Provost, the Lieutenant should, having the right foot on the footprint noted with number 4 and the left foot on the footprint noted with number 3, steal his sword underneath the guard of the Provost's sword and throw a maindroit or thrust from above in order to complete the quadrangle. The Lieutenant holds the fingers of the sword hand downwards and the left hand before his face as is shown above in his illustration noted with number 75.

Thus the completion of the strike made in the form of the quadrangle for the Lieutenant against the defending Provost.

Here follows the defence and completion of the strike with its two follow-ups in the form of a quadrangle for the defending Provost against the attacking Lieutenant.

And in order to do this, the Provost should for this first follow-up, being on the right foot, cross and beat down the renvers or thrust from above thrown on this one by the Lieutenant, strong on weak, holding the guard of the sword (with) the fingers of the sword hand downwards, throwing a thrust from above to the left eye of the Lieutenant, as is shown above in this illustration and figure noted with number 74 as with other illustrations. And for this second opposition and follow-up, which is the completion of this quadrangle, the Provost should also be on the right foot and watch carefully the point of the Lieutenant's sword -- (as) in all the discourse of the quadrangle, and cross the Lieutenant's sword making this second opposition -- which is a maindroit or thrust from above coming from this one<sup>31</sup>, strong on weak, holding the fingers of the sword hand upwards threatening the Lieutenant with a thrust to his face, holding the left hand to his breast as is shown above in his illustration noted with number 76.

The end of the quadrangle for the Provost.

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30 *parachevement*

31 *provenant d'iceluy*

After having treated above of all the art, order and practice of the single sword and defined all which is required for it, both for the attacker and the defender, I really want hereafter to treat and show four very good and subtle holds<sup>32</sup> which they can do, both for the attacker and the defender, as will be seen hereafter in their illustrations.

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32 *prinzes*