

Here is a current list of things a set/props/costume/lighting designer should consider when doing a show with fights in them.

1. The surface of the floor. I love a shiny floor as much as every designer out there, but please consider what happens to the surface once the boots/shoes get done with the fight. Asking a fight director to change the fight for the sake of the floor will violate the sustainability and safety of the fight.

If the FD can know as much as possible about the floor during preproduction meetings, then it will be on them to stage a fight while being mindful of the surface. This will require coordination and cooperation from the costume designer with boot/shoe choices.

2. Are we dragging a body off stage and/or through a doorway?

If so, we need proper access through the door and/or off stage. The body needs to drag past sight lines so the actor can come to standing without being seen.

The surface needs to accommodate the dragging and costumes has to be prepared for their clothes to be dragged across the floor.

3. Weapons may be used. If so do they impact the set and floor. Please talk to the FD and discover their design expectations. If the set, furniture and/or floor can not bear being used in a fight or have weapons crash onto them, say so during the preproduction meetings and not at tech. By then it's too late.

4. Lights. How are they focused and hung. More than once we've had to deal with light trees, or bars hanging in the wings to achieve side lighting. This does two things:

A: blind the actors and

B: Made it impossible to exit or enter the stage.

Have these conversations during the preproduction meetings so all learn each other's expectations. Again, it may be too late to make safe changes if we discover these issues during tech.

5. Blood. If the Director is asking for blood, The first question is why. The second question is how much. The third question is, which department will be responsible for the blood? The next question is, what is the blood made of.

Also, who's in charge of the clean up.

If the blood is going into the eyes, and mouth or touching any mucous membranes, it has to be safe. The blood cannot accommodate Costumes first and Actors second. It must be the other way around.

I've mentioned this before, but preproduction is the time to discuss blood. It is not advisable to discuss this during tech.

Also, if there are blood delivery systems, which department is creating those.

Then, once that creation has been established, let's take a look at the blood delivery system long before we hit it in tech.

I advise using the blood delivery system in the rehearsal room with water so all can see how everything will work. Again, during tech is not the time to discover whether it will work.

6. Stairs. If the set is going to have stairs, then the Fight Director must accommodate those during the fight.

So collaboration between the Set Designer and the Fight Director is Key.

If an actor is asked to roll down the stairs, then great care must be made, and how we're padding the actor and/or the stairs.

If the actors are fighting up and down the stairs, then we need to talk about a real and/or a wall that they can use to fight safely.

A wide open staircase is very dangerous.

They look beautiful, and I understand why we do it. But we need to discuss, communicate, collaborate, or it will be a disaster for the actors.

7. Doors. If we're doing a farce and we need the doors to slam shut and open and slam shut again, then they must be able to accommodate all that action.

I've done so many shows with the doors fall apart.

We must be mindful of the actors using doors, how they catch, and if the actors can smash their fingers while closing the doors because the door knob is too close to the frame.

We must stay as close to code as possible because that's what people are used to. Sometimes we design doors, stairs, and other things on set to accommodate the design, but they're off code, so kinesthetically, the human using the item is not used to the stair height or how close the door knob is to the door jam. Ouch is the word we most hate to hear.