

# HISTORICAL PASSION

DAVID BAKER REVEALS HIS GREATEST CHALLENGE ON "FORGED IN FIRE" AND MUCH MORE

STORY BY JOSHUA SWANAGON  
PHOTOS BY DAVID BAKER AND HISTORY

**B**ringing his own style, David Baker adds a touch of class to "Forged in Fire." My first introduction to David was on the show "Deadliest Warrior." As a martial artist myself, I was immediately drawn to this show for its honest depiction of the fighting styles and weapons of some of history's deadliest warriors. But something that really caught my eye were the excellent and fully functional replicas of some of the weapons, created by David, that these warriors used.

I got to speak with David about his latest endeavor, "Forged in Fire," and his love for the historical weapons that he's so good at reproducing.

## Historical Scholarship

**KI:** What started your interest in historical weapons?

**DB:** I got my start in historical weapons the way most of us do, from watching swashbuckling movies as a kid. I never missed them if I could help it. I'd stay up late or even stay home from school on occasion to watch them. It was a bit of an obsession.

**KI:** Are there any resources that you recommend for anybody interested in studying the history of edged weapons (general study or in-depth weapon by weapon specificity)?

**DB:** As far as historical resources, there are several hundred years of books on the subject, but there is no substitute for handling original period examples of the weapons you are interested in. It is also good to handle as many as you can to understand the subtle differences. Many private collections as well as museums are willing to do private handling or viewing sessions.

**KI:** What is the coolest historical piece you have had the opportunity to handle?

**DB:** I think the coolest historical weapon I have had the chance to handle was a Scottish basket-hilt sword with the most incredibly light and flexible blade. It changed the way I look at and build those weapons.

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OPPOSITE PHOTO CREDIT: HISTORY



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**KI:** What is your personal favorite historical weapon?

**DB:** My favorite weapons would have to be rapiers. They are an amazing combination of art and deadly intent.

**KI:** What attributes do you think are important in a combat knife?

**DB:** My weapons' choice tends to stay with the classics, so in a combat knife I tend to like the dirk-type blades: heavy enough to slash; a good point for the thrust; minimal guard and a good blade length.

## "Forged in Fire"

**KI:** How did you get involved with "Forged in Fire"?

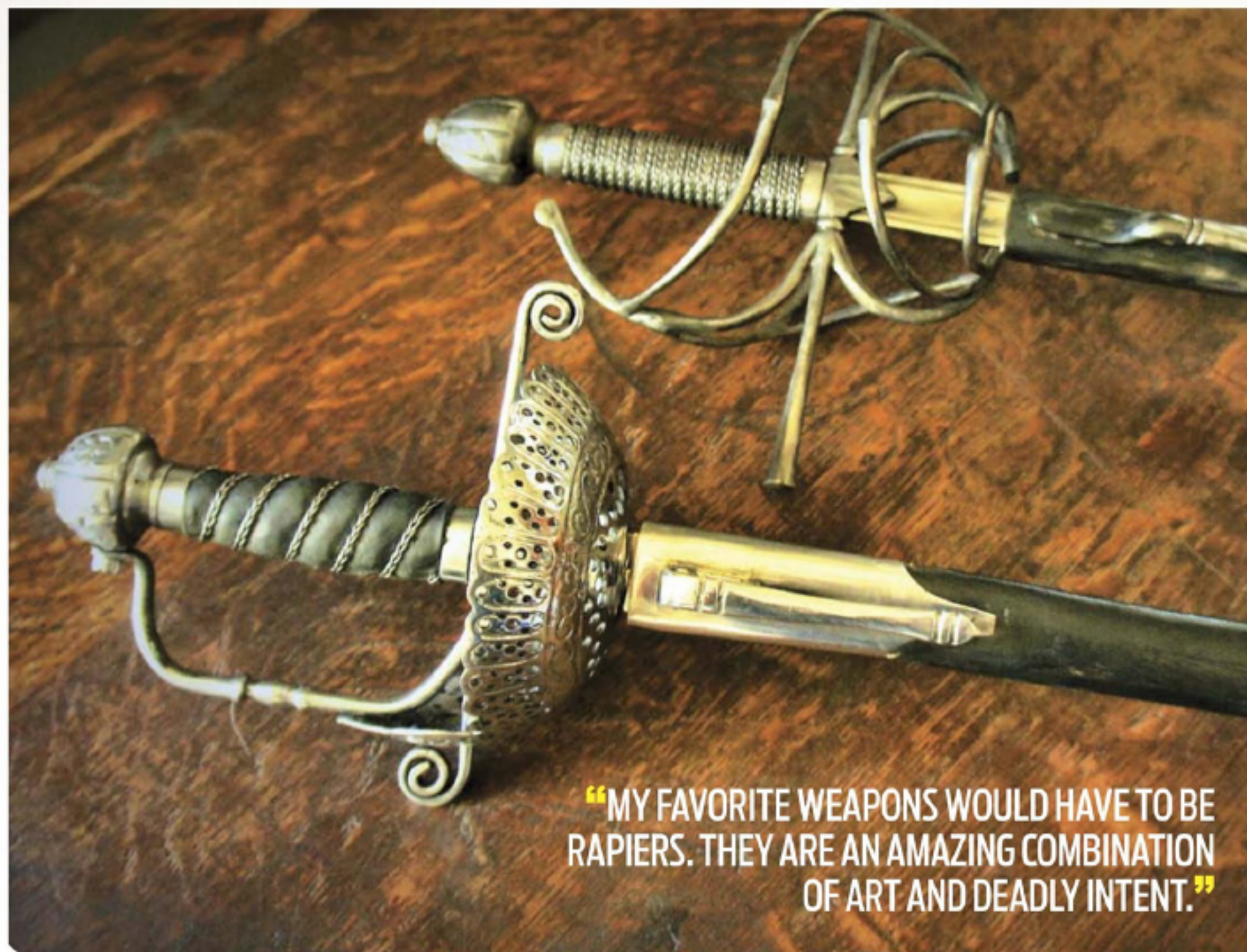
**DB:** "Forged in Fire" came to me through a few different channels. I've been working in the entertainment

industry as a prop maker, specializing in historical weapons, for the past 20 years, working on several historical and weapons-based shows. The show was looking for a weapons smith who did historical recreation, and I was recommended by several of the other people they had contacted about doing the show.

**KI:** Was it a hard transition to go from being mostly behind the scenes of "Deadliest Warrior" (until season three) to being in front of the camera in "Forged in Fire"?

**DB:** It wasn't hard to step in front of the camera again. I started my career in the entertainment business as an actor. Back in the '80s I did some TV, film and commercial work. It paid the bills, so it wasn't a big step.





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**KI:** Which did you prefer, behind the scenes or being an active member of the on-camera cast?

**DB:** “Forged in Fire” gives me the perfect opportunity to be active in front of and behind the camera. I work with the challenge department refining some of the tests as well as building the historical weapons displayed on the show in the third round reveal.

**KI:** Are any of the reference weapons actual historical pieces?

**DB:** I think there have only been five weapons displayed on the show that I didn’t make. I don’t think any were “historical” pieces.

**KI:** What has been your greatest challenge being a part of “Forged in Fire”?

**DB:** The biggest challenge on the show has been staying ahead of production with making the weapons. Last year I made more than 40

Rapiers are David’s favorite historical weapons. These two are a couple of David’s personal creations.

weapons for the show, and all of them go through the same tests we ask the smiths to put their weapons through; although my weapons must go through them several times as we test the test and practice.

**KI:** What is your best story/memory working on “Forged in Fire”?

**DB:** It’s hard to say what the best story/memory from the show is. There are so many from backstage that I can’t talk about and so many stories of smiths rising to or above the challenges on the show. One of the hardest things about the show is sending a smith home after you watch him fight his way through a challenge.

**KI:** How has your time on “Forged in Fire” enhanced your personal business?

**DB:** On the breaks from production I usually do some traveling and work on the weapons for the next season. So, for me this is a year-round job. Of

course, I have a lot higher visibility now because of the show, and I look forward to getting back to making what I want. As far as my personal business goes... well, at this point this is my personal business.

**KI:** Are there any changes, formatting or otherwise, planned for “Forged in Fire” that you are at liberty to talk about?

**DB:** As far as changes coming up on the show, all I can say is we will try to keep it fresh and challenging, while being true to the craft of bladesmithing.

**KI:** Do you have any advice for “Forged in Fire” contestants scheduled to compete on the show?

**DB:** My advice to anyone planning on being on the show is watch it. The tools don’t change much. Train—forging in our house is not like forging at home. Between the clock, cameras, heat, producers asking questions while

you work, etc., if you are not ready, you are going to melt down and anger in.

## Knife Testing

**KI:** Are you involved in the creation of any of the tests for the show?

**DB:** We have a creative team who designs most of the tests. However, sometimes we have to modify a test to make it specific to the weapon. That’s where I work with the team with my example weapon to refine the test. We don’t want tests that do nothing but destroy weapons, we want to see how they feel and perform. The second-round tests are tested with one of J’s blades, so again, we are not asking the smiths to do something we haven’t done. My experience doing this kind of work on other shows helps.

**KI:** What goes into the planning and creation of the tests?

**DB:** Some of the tests seem a bit extreme, but weapons in a combat situation come up against all types of targets and all types of obstacles.

David works on Big Blue on the set of “Forged in Fire.”

**KI:** How much fun is it getting to play with such elaborate testing grounds on a regular basis?

**DB:** The testing is the most fun. Wish I got to do more of it.

## Knife Making

**KI:** How long have you been making knives?

**DB:** I am often asked that. Knife making is only a small part of what I do. I consider myself a weapon smith with a focus on swords. Honestly, I had been making swords for years before I started making knives. I’ve been at it for about 25 years and doing it as my primary living for the past 20 or so.

**KI:** What sparked your interest in knife making?

**DB:** While working with a group that does western reenactments I was asked to make a bowie knife, like Tell Sacket’s, for someone in the group—a 15-inch Bowie with a stag crown handle. It was a monster.

**KI:** Has your time on “Forged in Fire”

influenced or changed the way you think about your own designs or processes?

**DB:** I don’t think my design process has been changed by my work on the show, but my knowledge of different ways to build has. There have been plenty of times I have been watching a smith work and thought, “that is never going to work,” just to be proven wrong. Then I must give it a try and see if I can get it to work.

**KI:** Do you have a personal favorite style of knife that you like to make?

**DB:** My favorite knives to make vary from year to year. I traveled to Scotland and after that it was the dirk. Before that it was the mountain man bowies and before that renaissance daggers. It keeps changing.

**KI:** What was the most difficult historical replica you have ever made?

**DB:** The most difficult weapon to make for the show—and to make well and properly—I haven’t finished yet, so







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they won't let me talk about it. Let's just say I feel sorry for the smiths that draw that one.

### Wrapping Up

**KI:** Do you do any apprenticeship programs?

**DB:** As far as work goes, like many smiths, I am a bit of a loner. I don't teach or take apprentices—way too cranky while working [laughs]. Not really. I tend to work on a strange schedule, keep weird hours, and I am a serial non-joiner.

**KI:** Is there anything else you would like to say to your fans?

**DB:** The thing I hope people take away from the show is the creativity and drive of the smiths. The show is about them. Without them we don't get to have a show. The armchair quarterbacks critique and criticize the smith that gets sent home, but they will never understand the nature of this competition until they step onto our floor.

We work in a medium that is so

PHOTO CREDIT:  
HISTORY

incredible. It combines the four elements and has been considered sacred in countless cultures throughout history, to the point of having its own gods. I'm proud to be part of a show that is helping to bring awareness of this craft to the public, as well as inspiring others to create.

*Knives Illustrated* would like to thank David for his time and candor, while sharing his incredible craft with us. You are truly a class act, David, and the show benefits from your presence. **KI**

### David Baker in the Media

David Baker is no stranger to being in front of the camera or making weapons for use in film. Having acted in soap operas such as “Santa Barbara” and “The Young and the Restless” to having parts in movies such as “St. Elmo's Fire” and “Grease 2,” David finds his longest list of credits goes to making props and weapons for film and television.

Other than “Forged in Fire,” David's work can be seen in shows such as (source IMDB.com):

- “Tower of Joy: A Game of Thrones Fan Film” (Short, swordsmith)
- “Deadliest Warrior” (TV Series, weapons master, 29 episodes)
- “Leverage” (TV Series, specialty propmaker, 5 episodes)
- “Dude, What Would Happen” (TV Series, catapult builder, 1 episode)
- “The Nine Lives of Chloe King” (TV Series, specialty prop builder, 1 episode)
- “NCIS: Los Angeles” (TV Series, specialty propmaker, 1 episode)
- “Jonah Hex” (props, uncredited)
- “Legion” (specialty prop builder, uncredited)
- “Dragonball: Evolution” (sword maker, as David Baker, and weapon props, uncredited)
- “Beowulf” (sword maker)
- “Battleground: The Art of War” (TV Series, weapon props, 1 episode)

### Contact

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