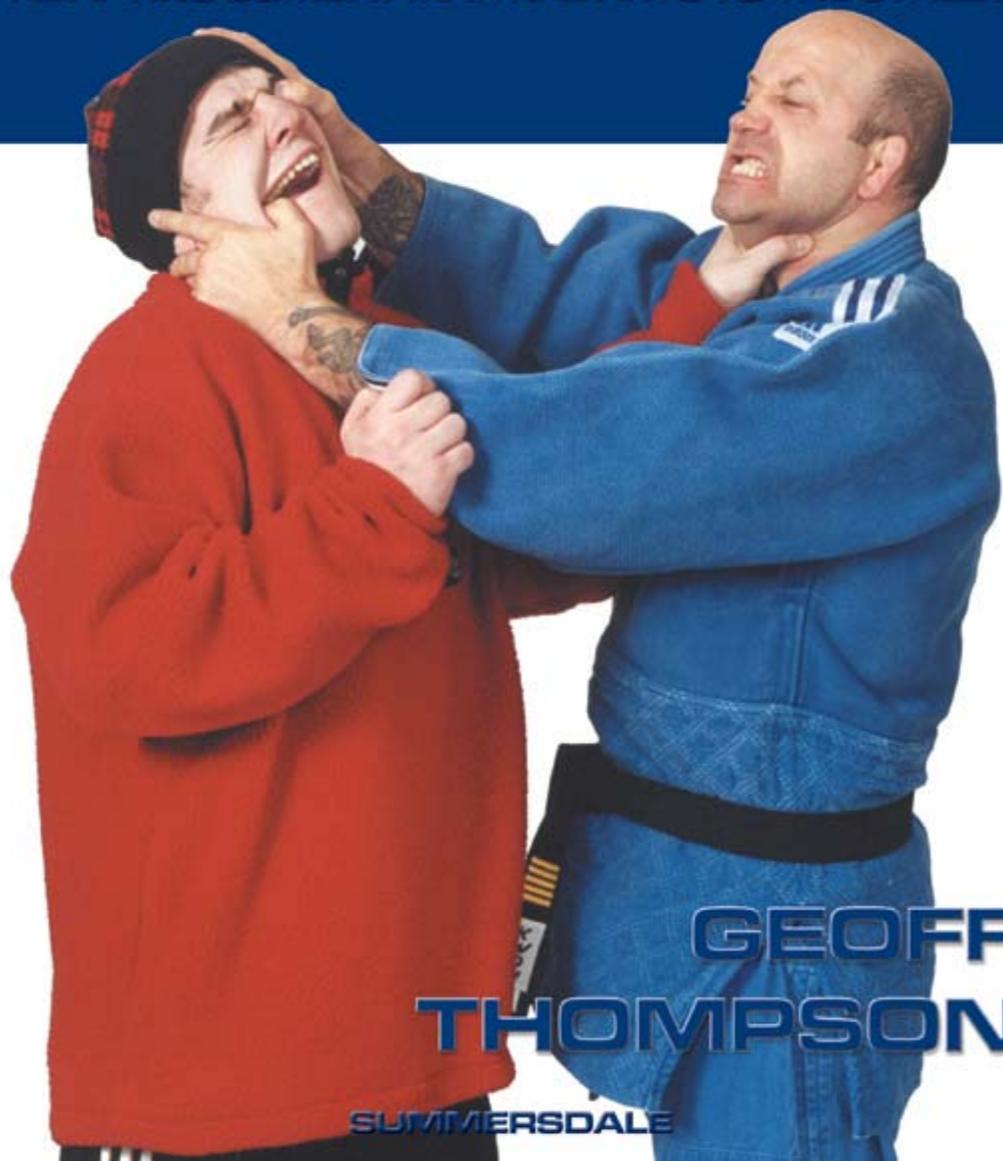


THE
**PAVEMENT
ARENA**

ADAPTING COMBAT MARTIAL ARTS TO THE STREET



**GEOFF
THOMPSON**

SUMMERSDALE

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Introduction

Thirty years ago karate (and all martial arts for that matter) was veiled by a curtain of mystique. If you practised it as an art form, for exercise or purely as a means of self-defence, it went without saying that this mystique extended itself to you, automatically making you a dangerous person in the eyes of others. Competence in self-defence was of course an inevitable by-product, or at least everyone thought so. Talk of registering one's hands with the police as 'dangerous weapons' was commonplace and known karateka were given an extremely wide berth by would-be antagonists.

The aura of mystery surrounding the martial arts grew because there was only a small nucleus of people involved, and it was believed that one was special if a part of that minority. In reality one was not so much 'special' as lucky to find a club or instructor to teach you, as there were so very few of either at that time.

The cinema soon put a stop to that!

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With the emergence of Bruce Lee and celluloid kung fu the many-splendoured world of martial arts exploded into our lives with an impressive bang, via posters, film, TV and magazines; vignettes of superhuman fighting, fantastic stories of human endurance and seemingly impossible feats of strength and speed became common. Black belts came out of every crack and crevice in the woodwork, started up clubs, made fortunes and spawned more black belts, who in their turn started up more clubs making more fortunes and more black belts. All of a sudden everyone and their dog was a black belt – or at least they wore one. Due to this popularity and the poor standard displayed by many of the new breed of martial artists, the words ‘black belt’ lost their magic, and respect for the martial arts declined quickly.

Not long after the celluloid explosion came competition karate. With a multitude of people practising karate and with the emergence of so many new styles and associations, competition became a way in which exponents could fight in a controlled environment, testing their metal against one another in an attempt to discover which of the many contenders would emerge as a champion.

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Practising technique in a controlled environment is a good idea, though attempting to find a supreme karate champion isn't.

In their bid to inflate already engorged egos, win yet another competition, and obtain more trophies, fighters began to drift away from the origins of karate in search of tournament techniques and moves that would catch the referee's eye. In many quarters point scoring relegated the martial arts from superb to superfluous, from art to arty, from power to flower power, from hard to lard and from maim to game.

We had become a sport.

Many people did not or could not see this degeneration, believing that competition fighting was the real thing.

In reality of course, street and competition fighting are completely different arenas. Originally the contests did start in the right vein, they were tough, uncompromising arenas where bloody battles were fought and fighting spirit was tested to capacity. Because of this blood and snot element,

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rules were changed and certain dangerous blows were banned. Controlled technique became the order of the day.

The new rulings shackled many of the warhorses of yesteryear and opened the doors to the wimp element who manipulated and engineered the rule book in their bid to win. Karate was pushed into the world of sport where it lay precariously, like a six-gun in a children's nursery.

The dive became commonplace, and in many cases instinctive. Some team coaches could be heard telling their fighters to stay down so the team might win the bout through disqualification. Every arena around the country, nay the world, had at least one mat that sported fighters performing their renditions of dying flies. Many fighters of the old school pulled away from these new competitions in disgust and entered the full contact ring, joining or forming organisations that embraced the old values. They are as strong and enduring as the roots of an old oak. The wimp element come and go like the seasons, finding nothing of any real substance to hold them and no joy when they throw plastic techniques into the mincer of a live situation only to find themselves beaten into submission.

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Nowadays comments on or about karateka are a complete contrast to the compliments of yesteryear. It is common to hear 'He's a good karate man, I wonder if he's any good in the street?'

Karate, in general, is not practised with reality in mind. For this reason many karateka would be ineffective in the street.

Adapted karate is a popular talking point in today's martial arts magazines. Articles about practical street skills are generating far more interest and page space. Why? Because people want and need the skills necessary to take them from the dojo to the street.

A change of ryu is not necessary. Although certain elements within the school may need alteration, it is a change of perception and attitude that is called for. Complacency must be erased and adversity sought if realistic fighting skills are to be attained and retained. It is attitude not aptitude that determines altitude.

In my books *Watch My Back* and *Dead or Alive* I talked about adaptation, though it was outside the scope of both to expand