

ART OF WAR

by Ande Wanderer

Move over, aerobics. Step aside, spinning. Martial arts have been inching their way into the mainstream for years, but now they're bigger than ever thanks to recent chick-dominated fight flicks such as *Charlie's Angels* and the tremendously successful *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. The 9-to-5 set are practicing their punches at posh health clubs, low budget kung-fu flicks are considered cult classics, and you can't even turn on your TV late at night without catching infomercials hawking bastardized martial art work-out videos. Even President George W. Bush donned a *ji* and dropped in on Chuck Norris to receive an honorary black belt during the Republican National Convention.

While traditionally in the United States martial arts have been dominated by men, a growing number of women are joining dojos and learning how to keep their adversaries in order. The International Martial Arts Association in Louisville says about 40 percent of its clientele are women. "They are doctors, lawyers, executive of big companies," said Faye Madani, who runs the school with her husband. "It helps them to stay fit and to gain confidence." Many are mothers who initially bring their children to the school, Madani said, and then decide to give it a try themselves when they see the benefits to female students.

Stacy Ruud, a first-degree black belt who studies at the Chinese Shao-Lin Center, said from her perspective it's still "just a male-dominated sport." She estimates there are about 10 guys to every woman at her school. But it all depends on the school: at the relatively new Colfax and Vine location of United Studios of Self-Defense, 19 out of 40 students are women—just about 50-50.

"The regular image that comes with martial arts is that it's a man's sport. It's not. It's a person's sport. It's a way to develop yourself as a person," said Tony Henkenberns, a first-degree black belt who teaches at the school. It doesn't surprise him there are still schools which have a mostly male student population, though. "You get a lot of teachers who are really hard-core. They have too much

testosterone for some of the women."

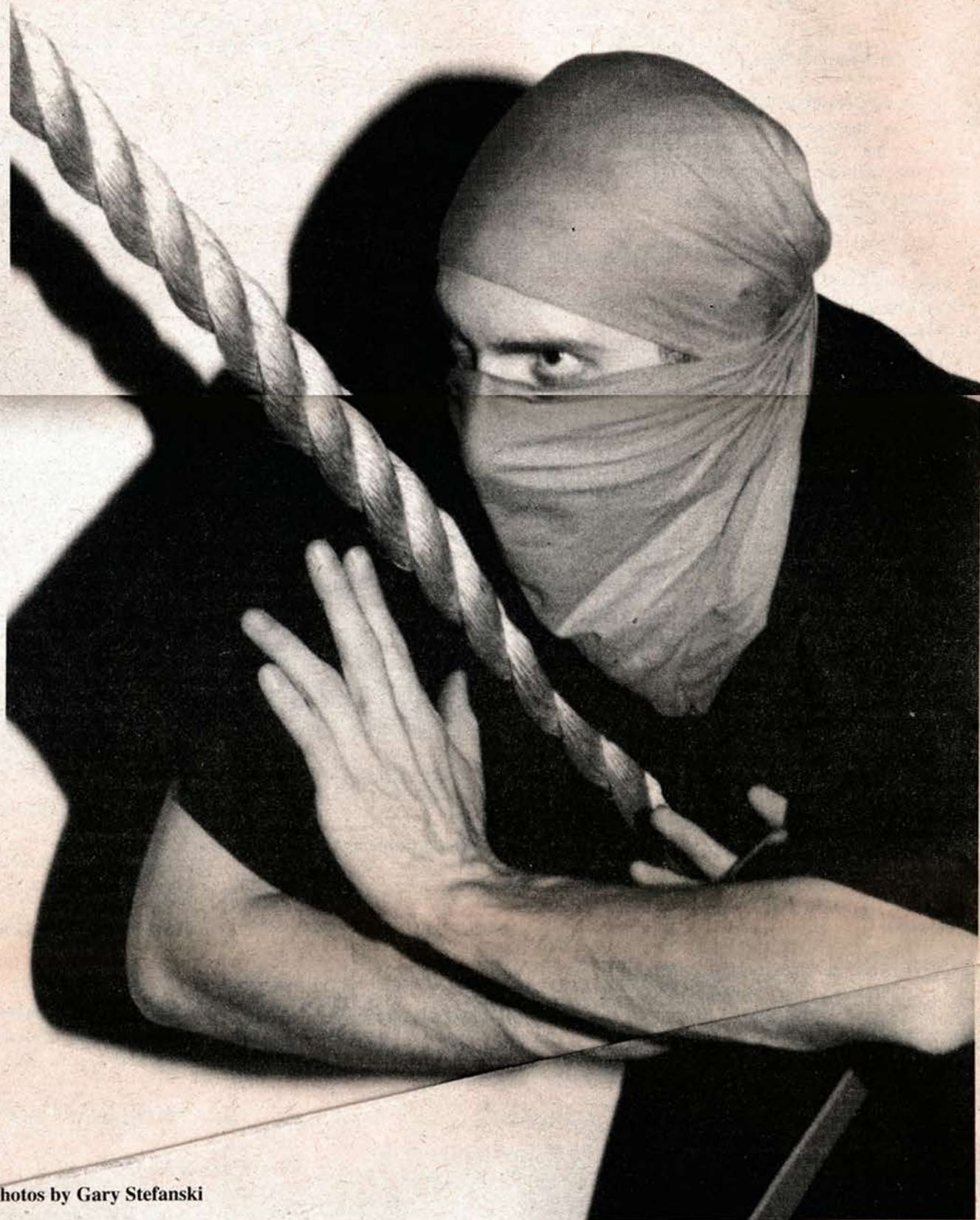
The term 'martial arts' is broad and encompasses many systems, esoteric and otherwise. Some such as *t'ai chi ch'uan* are designed to gather inner energy and induce a meditative state. Some are fused with other arts such as the dance-like *capoeira* from Brazil, while others are utilized primarily for health and self defense like *tae kwon do*. With hundreds

of styles to choose from, the decision of which martial art and particular school is right for you is not an endeavor to be conducted hastily.

"Really, you want to find the place you feel comfortable going to," said Ghassan Timani, state president of the U.S. Tae Kwon Do Union. "People usually just call up and want to compare rates, rather than, 'Is this a place I'd want to send my

child to?' Or, 'Is this a place I'd want to come to myself?' Unfortunately it takes a lot more research than just a phone call."

Some things to consider are: do you want to just learn to fight using just your body (such as with most karate) or would you like to learn how to use weapons (as with kung fu)? Are you interested in learning 'hard' techniques such as strikes and



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