



■ **Get your kicks** - Zara Phythian and Kayley Marke give our brave reporter an impressive demonstration.



Said Zara: "One of the great things about our programme is that you don't have to be a martial artist to join, pretty much anyone can become an aspiring screen fighter. Obviously martial arts experience is a benefit, but throughout the training programme you will pick up basics and progress from there." The knack of becoming a screen fighter, explained Zara, is being able to react appropriately to the over-the-top blows being aimed near your head. We would also have to learn to be aware of the imaginary camera angle.

Zara showed me that the same sequence could look wince-inducingly realistic or completely fake depending on the angle you viewed it from. Kayley Marke, a 17-year-old martial artist and a world champion in her own right, would be working with me for the afternoon. We started by throwing basic punches at each other and timing the reaction to make it look as real as possible. There is a surprising amount of work involved, even in making this basic trick look real, partly because it feels so unnatural at first.

Although I am used to having punches aimed at my head through my own martial arts experience, I found I had to throw out the rule book on how to take a punch to make it look good on the screen. Zara likened the head-whipping motion to imagining you had a baseball cap on your head and trying to make it fly off over your shoulder. We then practiced reacting to heavier blows and added staggered, punch-drunken steps to the movement.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Zara's teenage students cart wheeling, flipping and spinning over various objects like it was the most natural thing in the world, and felt a pang of embarrassment at how I was struggling with the basics. But despite my lack of natural acting talent, Kayley was very patient and we even managed to put together a short punching and kicking combination sequence.

And you can guarantee that even with my humble first foray into the screen fighting world, with such talented coaches it

would not be long before I could start to look like the real deal. Even Zara's coaches in training, 14 year olds Aidan Limb and Raven Wright, were helping me to master a basic cartwheel. We didn't quite get there, but it was as close as I've ever been to managing it. Whether I could go as far as Zara, who at just 22, is high kicking her way to the top, is quite another thing.

With 15 years of martial arts experience under her black belt, a fantastic look and a fearless approach to doing her own stunts, Zara is quickly becoming the darling of action movie producers over here and in the US. Having just returned from filming in the States, Zara has a number of projects in the pipeline for this year and beyond. And as she presses forward with her own career, so she carves the way for the future stars of the gym hoping their training will catapult them to the big time. Said Zara: "As long as we stay focused and still believe in ourselves, eventually we will get to where we want to be. Here's to the future and good luck to all aspiring screen fighters and future movie stars!" ■

■ For more information on classes and prices log on to [www.personalbestacademy.com](http://www.personalbestacademy.com) or telephone 01623 656890

