

OFFICIAL KARATE

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**They're Not
Laughing At The
Wild Count Dante
Now!**

**Chester Miller Shows How
"Those Fancy Techniques
Can Kill You!"**

**The Revenge
Of Benny Urquidez**

**An *EXCLUSIVE*
Interview with
the *NEW*
Joe Lewis**



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They're Not Laughing At Count Dante Now!

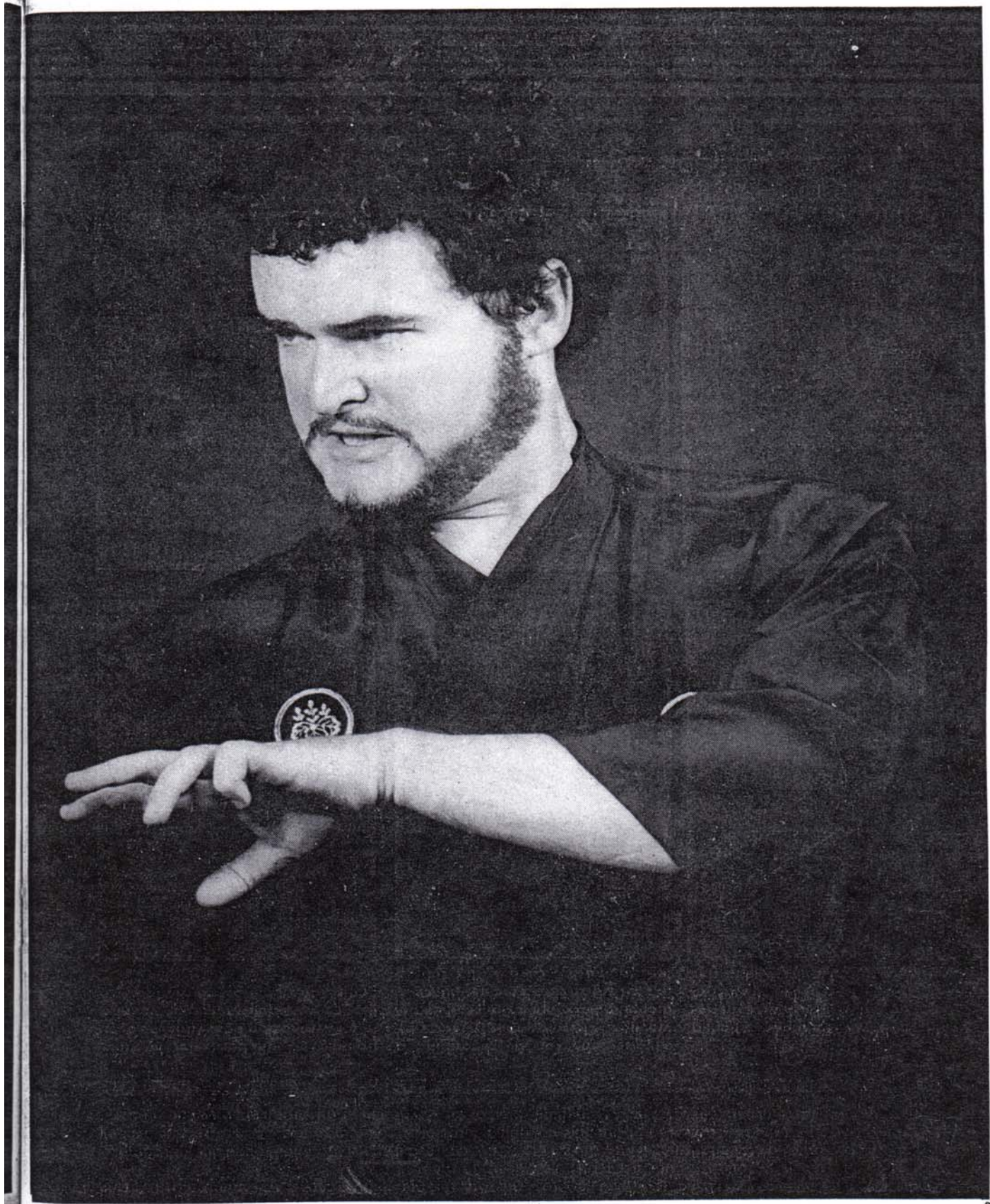
BY ALAN VASQUEZ

John Keehan, also known as Count Dante, was a joke in the martial arts for a good number of years. Not in the early days of the USKA — which he helped build — of course; back then John Keehan was a respected member of the traditional martial arts establishment. He studied under Robert Trias himself, beginning as far back as 1961; he was a brown belt under the USKA head in less than a year and a half, and was promoted to sandan by his sensei in 1964.

In February of 1976, less than a year after Dante's death, Robert Trias had this to say about his former student: "While in my dojo and in the USKA, John (Dante) was a good student, dedicated and ... very loyal to me and USKA. John, without a doubt, was greatly instrumental in the expansion of USKA and especially in organizing and bringing together the karate schools and karatekas in the Midwest. As a leader he had great potential ... There was no one like him anywhere."

On December 7th in 1964, shortly





He tried to show the staid traditionalists that there were flaws in what the Masters had handed down ... that many techniques wouldn't work in the streets.

after Trias awarded Dante (then Keehan) his third dan, the sensei expelled the student from his dojo and from the USKA for "conduct unbecoming the true spirit of karatedo..." Dante was only 25 years old at the time, and had already begun to incur the wrath of the American martial arts community.

His dismissal from the USKA was prompted by a desire to expand his knowledge of the fighting arts by traveling out of the Trias fold to sample other martial systems. That attitude was greatly frowned upon in those early days (as it still is to an extent today), and it branded Dante a rebel. He did study other martial arts, and finally broke away altogether from the classical karate school of thought.

Not too long after that, John Keehan became Count Dante, and stunned the martial arts world by starting his own fighting system, called *dim mak*, and proclaiming himself Master — "the deadliest man alive." Most of the outrage died down after a time, to be replaced by laughter. Dante had become a comic figure within the martial arts community, and the traditionalists felt that if they simply ignored him, he would soon vanish.

Dante refused to vanish, of course, and until his death on May 26th, 1975, remained a huge, gouging thorn in the side of "traditional karate" in the United States. Just about everything he said and did caused a furor, and far from being upset by the commotion he caused, Dante revelled in it. He simply delighted in raising the dander of those who shunned him. But there was method to his mayhem. Beneath the facade of bombast and outrageous theatrics, there was a point to be demonstrated. Dante was trying to show the staid traditionalists that there were flaws in what the Masters had handed down.

Everyone was too busy fuming or laughing at the Count to listen to what he had to say.

Since Dante's death, after all the commotion, allegation, and supposition had faded, the Dante Death



Present dan-te head, Bill Aguiar.

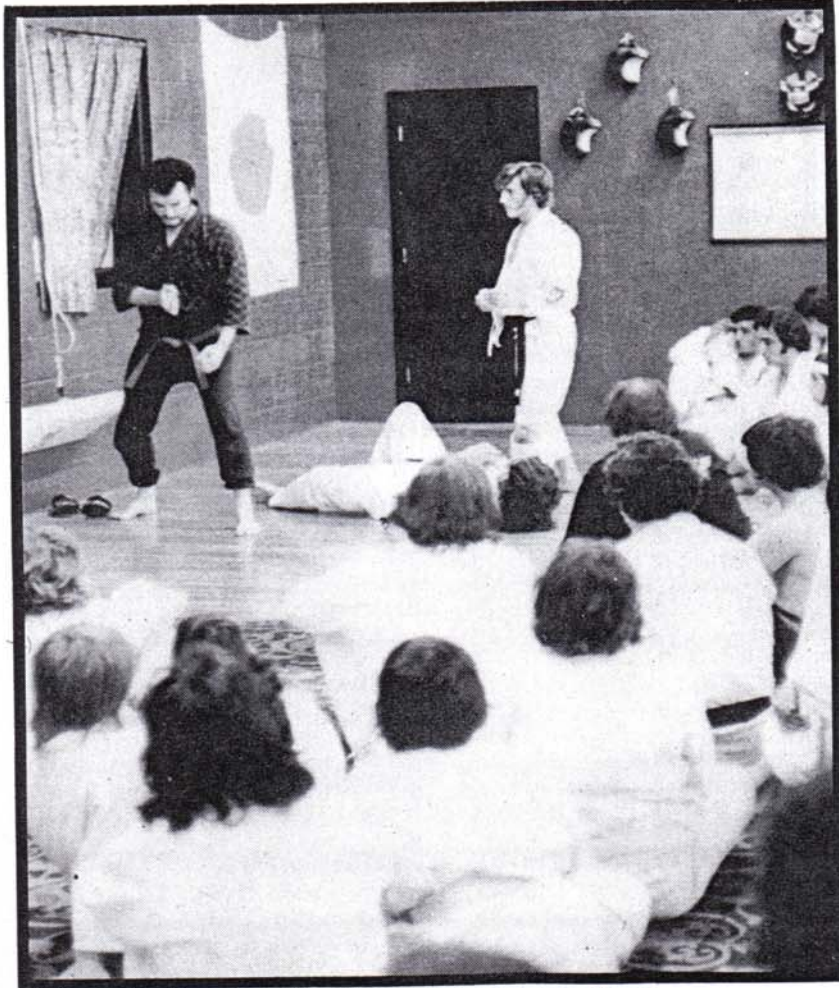
System appeared to fade as well. The Count's prime disciple and living head of the system, Bill Aguiar, seemed almost relieved that the controversy would end at last. In counterpoint to Dante's flamboyance, Aguiar chose to keep a decidedly low profile where *dim mak* was concerned. Though he is still teaching dan-te, he has chosen not to promote it in the manner of his forbear.

"I'm still teaching the dan-te system," says Aguiar. "Only we're doing it a little quieter now. That's basically the only difference. After his death, I wanted to continue with

the mail - order business and so forth, but 1975 was a bad time, and dojos were closing all over the country. This affected the mail order, also. Most of these ads (the notorious 'dim mak,' 'deadliest man alive' ads) were in a lot of different types of magazines, including the martial arts magazines, one of which seemed to be dying every month. Because of that, we just decided to let it (mail - order business) go for the time being.

"Now we have begun building up our schools in the New England area, and going more into the health - spa business. It's evident that there's very little 'big' money left in karate. There

"If you don't want to do damage with a technique, you might as well not know the technique. If you're afraid to draw a gun and pull the trigger, don't carry it!"



Dante teaching class. His philosophy was to respond to a street attack with swift, often lethal blows.

is still big money for what karate people consider to be big money ... If a karateist can make a living with his dojo, he thinks he's doing great. Right now, we're negotiating with a nationwide chain, incorporating systems of private self - defense into the health - spa idea."

Aguiar presently rides herd over four schools in the state of Massachusetts — the same schools that he and Dante opened together — and is in the process of inserting a self - defense program into an already existing health spa in Connecticut. After he took over as head of the Dante organization, he found that

there was a significant number of karate people in his area who were interested in purchasing a franchise to teach dante (dim mak, whatever). Aguiar feels that they anticipated making a fast buck over the controversial Dante, now that he had died. But the franchises either never got off the ground or fizzled out very quickly, for none exist today.

New York sensei Frank Ryan claims to be teaching dim mak (among other things) in his Bronx dojo, but claims no affiliation with Aguiar, or the Dante organization in general. A while back there was some speculation that Ryan might become

head of the Count's organization after his death, but these rumors were completely unfounded. Aguiar says that although Ryan's basic teaching philosophy is in tune with that of dan-te, the sensei from New York was not allied with Dante.

Since Bill Aguiar has taken the reins of the World Karate Federation (Dante's parent organization), there have been many changes in approach, if not in substance. He no longer pushes dan-te, neither to the media nor to students.

Says Bill: "When a student first comes into the school, we don't immediately begin teaching him the bastardized system which is called the dan-te system. We start off with classical karate. If we're running a judo program, we're teaching kodokan judo; we're not teaching Count Dante's version of kodokan judo. All the different systems we do teach are classical. A lot of our students *never* go into the dan-te system.

"If I started preaching dan-te the first week (of training), we'd have three - quarters of the students walking out the door. This has never really been understood. I mean, to try to push the dan-te system, if you're going to survive on what that alone brings in, is ridiculous. He (Dante) certainly never made any money with karate ... it ended up costing him money. Except if you want to consider mail order, which he never took seriously anyway.

"What we're doing now is coming out with the mail order again. But rather than doing one hard - cover book like *This is Karate*, we're going to do a series of short courses — 'The Dante System as Applied to Judo,' 'The Dante System as Applied to Karate...' As soon as you call it 'the Dante System,' it gives people an opportunity to dislike it because it isn't classical — in the purist's mind. Instead, we're going to take every technique that has been time - tested for the streets so that everyone from every system can find something here."

According to Aguiar, Dante never wanted all the controversy that he

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COUNT DANTE

stirred up ... at least he didn't want it initially. But when he first discovered that his ideas would not sit well with the karate establishment, he didn't care how many hornets' nests he shattered.

When, according to Bill Aguiar, Dante's students began winning in early karate tournaments, the purists rationalized that his system was only worthwhile for non contact, not where real blows were being exchanged. He took this as a challenge and wanted to promote (and *did* promote) full - contact fights. The karate community at large was aghast.

At that time," says Aguiar, referring to Dante's early full - contact, no - holds - barred tournaments, "everybody in the country came out against it — the Parkers, the Jhoon Rhees, the Steens ... These same people, six, seven years later, are all promoting it (full contact), making safety equipment and everything else!"

This seems to say something quite disturbing about Dante and his ideas. That is, the possibility that the man was actually right about his approach to the martial arts; that his ideas were so revolutionary, it is only now, three years after his death, that they are coming to be appreciated.

With the dawn of the professional, full - contact karate movement in this country, martial artists have begun to view their training in a different light. It became clear, with the early full - contact bouts, that karate people actually knew very little about *real* fighting, as well as what "being in shape" meant. It is only now, after professional karate fighters have trained in boxing techniques, that they have come to look "professional" at all.

What we have learned in the full-contact ring can also easily be translated to street situations. Traditional karate people train without hitting or being hit; consequently, they never actually know how either feels (unless, of course, they come from street-fighting backgrounds).

"When Dante wrote 'Karate is for Sissy's' for *Mr. America* magazine," says Bill Aguiar, "you people (OFFICIAL KARATE) were the only martial arts magazine that ran it. That was the best expose ever written



on the martial arts! The martial arts are a great Oriental con. The Orientals didn't have anything else to export, so they put these things (martial arts) together in packages, and pushed them out for the American dollar. Fortunately, some decent people have come out of it, but the martial arts are loaded with 'Walter Mittys.'

"Most of your karateists get their reputations by hanging the sign on the storefront. They became karateists because they couldn't make it in any other sport. Not all; you usually find that your best ones have excelled in other things. Karate is the only sport where you can win the 'East Jock Strap Tournament' in Montana, and you get a trophy five times the size of the America Cup!

"Now all the dojos are teaching more and more practical application — more street situations. The public is smart to it now. I don't think it was the kung fu movies that smartened the people up; joining dojos, getting picked on, and finding what they were taught didn't work really didn't do it either. What showed them was the holding back — the inhibition to really do damage (to someone else). If you don't want to do damage with a technique, you might as well not know the technique! If you're afraid to draw a gun and pull the trigger, don't carry it!"

Aguiar feels that the early full - contact fights did the martial arts damage in this country, in that people immediately related what they were seeing on their TV screens with what

they had heard about traditional karate. The two should have been seen as being totally different things, but the uninitiated fan assumed them to be one and the same. But he goes on to say that he does have admiration for those people who are presently fighting in the full - contact ring. "I can't knock the guys who are in there swinging," says Bill. "At least they *are* in there swinging, and that says a lot more than a lot of the heroes of the past."

Is it possible that Count Dante was ahead of his time? Are his preachings of ten years ago being embraced by even traditionalists today? Have we all found out that the martial arts, as everything else in our world, must learn to adapt and change with the times?

The American martial arts are entering into a brand new era. Many myths have been (and will continue to be) destroyed, and many questions remain yet unanswered. One thing is certain. Nobody's laughing at Count Dante now.

WHAT'S HAPPENING-WHERE?

OCTOBER 15. PENNSYLVANIA PRO/AM KARATE CHAMPIONSHIPS & STATE AWARDS BANQUET. To be held at the Holiday Inn of New Kensington, Penna. For further information please contact Frank Caliguri, 1719 Fifth Avenue, Arnold, Penna. 15068. Phone: (412) 335-9300.

OCTOBER 27-29. THIRD NATIONAL COLLEGIATE TAEKWONDO CHAMPIONSHIPS. To be held at 100 Harmon Gymnasium, University of California, Berkeley, Ca. For further information please contact Ken Min, 103 Harmon Gym, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720. Phone: (415) 642-7100.

NOVEMBER 4. 1978 CANADIAN OPEN KARATE CHAMPIONSHIP. Featuring Canadian Middleweight Kick-Boxing Championship. To be held at the Main Auditorium, Ottawa Civic Center, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. For further information please contact John Therien, TSS Promotions, Inc., 283 Montreal Road, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1L 6 CA. Phone: (613) 746-5402.