

A GUIDE ON THE NOBLE AND HONORABLE PRACTICE OF IAIJUTSU FOR THE LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS ROLEPLAYING GAME, 4TH EDITION

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Greetings, fellow warrior. It is my pleasure to instruct you on the modern art of iaijutsu, or Rokugani sword dueling. Being a veteran of the battlefield myself, I understand that a true man's desire is to seek glory and honor through this unquestionably honorable pursuit. There are those who consider dueling to be laughably outdated in the modern era, a frivolous and overly narrow warrior focus, and even a simple-minded method of giving certain clans their cherished reputation of highly esteemed bullies. To refute this griping would be a true waste of effort to any decent samurai: my goal is to enlighten you as regards the merits of bushido.

First, let us consider the physical and mental traits of the true duelist.

- To be grounded in Fire is important to any bushi. Not only does intelligence have a number of uses, but agility is required to properly wield a blade in a skirmish. There is little more embarrassing than being unable to strike your target in any but the briefest engagement!
- Water is surprisingly useful in conducting oneself in the dueling ring. Not only does superior strength lead to telling blows, but footwork becomes surer and swifter. If you truly outclass your enemy, it may even be able to keep hammering them with blows, only to dart away as they lumber around the ring after the first strike.
- Earth is the focus of some clans in the dueling ring. The Crab, for instance, are a simple people who scorn traditional first blood dueling. They believe that a bushi is meant for total war, and against their tireless foes only the Earth strengthens their bodies and minds to continue against all odds. Needless to say, excessive focus in Earth will deny you victory in duels fought for honor, giving you only a longer life on the battlefield—but not a glorious one.
- Air is one of the most important elements for a bushi to concentrate in. This element is defined by grace and social value, arguably the most important aspects of a champion duelist. Superior Reflexes enable a bushi to avoid blows that may otherwise be telling. By contrast, Awareness is vital to not only discern the true spirit of a rival, but essential to maintain the unblemished image of success that defines every successful duelist.
- Finally comes the ring of Void. While many consider Void primarily useful in conducting intricate tea ceremonies and patiently searching for enlightenment, it has applications beyond the perfect drawing of the sword. Used properly, it also has the ability to make one much more difficult to hit in a moment of battle, improves the ability to absorb otherwise ruinous injuries, and even improves the chance to inflict damage on the enemy. Unlike Earth or Air, though, the ability of the average samurai to call upon Void is limited each day. Yet if one is not expected to conduct many duels in a

day, which would indicate an uncouth and demanding society, surely Void can gain more importance than other, more persistently useful traits.

However, equally important to your pursuit of victory through dueling are the skills one learns throughout life. How one focuses on such important teachings is as important as one's natural ability, after all.

- Naturally, all duelists concentrate some amount of study into Iaijutsu. Concentrating on an emphasis, such as the Focus or Assessment stage, can prevent shameful mishaps in applying one's considerable knowledge of the blade. Some warriors will insist on practicing Iaijutsu to the near exclusion of all other skills! This has advantages to gaining particular Mastery of iaijutsu, yet can leave one woefully unprepared for other aspects of samurai life.
- Having at least some skill in Kenjutsu is vital to being a duelist. If one's first strike fails to kill the opponent entirely, then being able to strike when out of the meditative Center stance is important. In addition, minor mastery will make a bushi able to hit harder with swords.
- Focusing on studies of Etiquette and the Courtier arts not only helps improve one's ability to challenge and deflect challenges, but the unique insights gained at relatively easy Mastery is something no one should set aside. Of course, higher level Masteries are less useful to martial skill, and are usually ignored.
- Some amount of Defense can help prepare samurai for being able to evade the strikes of an enemy, forcing them to exert their moments of enlightenment to no purpose. Training in Jujutsu avoids shameful deaths at the hands of those who care not for formal duels, or at least enough skill to evade their grapples.
- The low arts, such as Stealth, Poison, Forgery, and even more shameful skills- these are the province of honorless and heartless individuals, who refuse to manfully face their opponent with sword in hand. To concentrate on such things can only blight your Perception of our society, and make you doubt the righteousness of open combat. Do not give such mean ways a moment's thought: surely no honorable samurai would dream of using them against you instead of a socially accepted duel!

Personal advantages matter considerably for individual samurai: often young bushi will focus their minds on these particular callings.

- Luck favors the mortal man, or so it is said. A missed strike may miraculously hit, so saving your career. Of course, calling for Luck may not work if the other bushi is also lucky- their fortune may prove greater than yours, even if both of you seek to change your fates.
- Prodigy: some schools focus on applying their teachings practically, while others encourage a narrower focus. For schools that do not encourage the practice of iaijutsu, some bushi try to gain their ancestors' favor, and so be Touched by the Spirit Realm of Yomi. Another bushi's Assessment cannot easily read a stance modified by such a blessing.

- Heart of Vengeance: if one's path is to specialize in combat against one particular clan, this advantage helps considerably in contested rolls.
- Sacred Weapons: Some weapons do far greater damage than regular katana, and are prized for the dueling ring, especially the Kaiu Blade and Kakita Blade.
- Strength of Earth: This advantage reduces the penalties many suffer from increasing injury, permitting them to fight even when hope is lost. It is relatively easy to acquire compared to other advantages.
- Paragon: Duty. A bushi who knows only their duty to clan need fear nothing- not disgrace, and not even death. Fight on through the worst injuries, and kill your enemy, even if Shinsei himself bars your way.

Some clans focus more on dueling than others. Among some examples:

- The Crane have the Kakita Bushi as a school that trains specifically for duels, and the powerful Kenshinzen as the purest expression of the dueling arts. Doji Warrior Poets sacrifice skirmish potential in exchange for even more successful and glorious duels.
- The Dragon Clan also have many strong schools. The two-blade style of the Mirumoto Bushi is revered through the Empire. Hojatsu's Legacy helps deny opponents the enlightenment of Void in their Focus rolls, while Swordmasters can gain a benefit to Focus as though they always succeed in their Assessment, regardless of whether they do or not.
- The Mantis College of Clarity helps with dueling techniques, or improving your thought processes outside the ring.
- Shiba Bushi of the Phoenix can focus Void more powerfully than any other school in the Empire, providing strong concentration on the most critical moments of a duel.
- Even the newest Akodo Bushi can either gain some insight (a "free raise", as it were) against their enemy, or ignore the enemy's armor.
- The Unicorn Calm Heart duelists strike more effectively when they do not intend to kill, which is very creditable. It would be bad if such warriors accidentally hurt each other. That is, more than necessary.
- Shinjo Bushi of the Unicorn can sometimes apply their lessons in Horsemanship to practical effect in the dueling arena, increasing their ability to call upon Iaijutsu. Even I am uncertain how they succeed- but indeed they do.
- Crab Defenders rely on absorbing initial punishment, and many are in good condition to mount a devastating counter attack after the hardest first strike. Yet even a regular Hida Bushi can absorb some such damage, especially with their heavy armor. They can take great injuries before expiring- which is excellent, as they will tend to lose duels to first blood.
- The Scorpion Blade holds the Saigo's Blades that gain an Assessment benefit from intimidating weaker enemies. Or the Scorpion Elite Guard, who can cause others to have sharply reduced technique effectiveness.

There are other groups that duel well:

- Topaz Champions gain a great ability to call upon their Void, as long as they use it to enhance particular school skills such as Iaijutsu. Other jeweled offices, such as that of the Emerald Champion, offer very powerful techniques that will help in all ranks of combat.
- Some ronin groups, like Tawagato's Army and the Sun Tao, can augment their iaijutsu with honor, while Kenburo's Way disciples can reduce the effectiveness of enemies.

While spells are generally banned during most legitimate duels, kata are vital to increasing your ability to fight.

- Striking as Void: Makes you harder to hit during the Center stance- that is, the entirety of a first blood duel
- The Empire Rests on its Edge: Empowers your Kenjutsu and Iaijutsu
- The World is Empty: Also increases your abilities in Kenjutsu and Iaijutsu.

HOW TO CONDUCT AN IAIJUTSU DUEL

- The challenged party may pick a time and place. However, during formal events like a Winter Court, typically the host will have a formal dueling ring, complete with mundane and magical protections against cheating. Within the ring, dishonorable personalities can expect guards to respond quickly and ruthlessly to any unforeseen event.
- A higher status judge, neutral to both parties, is the only one permitted to contest the result.
- For legal cases, only iaijutsu is permitted to resolve any dispute, which must be conducted with swords alone. For other cases, alternative duels may be agreed upon by both parties, such as taryu-jiai.
- A monk will bless the dueling grounds, preferably one neutral to both parties. Under extraordinary circumstances, the Seppun Guard may also cast a spell to nullify the use of higher techniques within a dueling ring- a rare circumstance in which a particular champion shows no regard for greater society. The Imperials are thus the only party that may cause the circumstances of a duel to dramatically change.

DUEL PREPARATION

Before a duel, both parties should plan for death, which can happen even in favorable circumstances. In the case of a lethal duel, the death of a champion will also result in their championed party being asked to commit seppuku. A judge will ask the challenger to confirm the terms of honor that started the challenge, and permit both parties one last chance to withdraw. However, most will prefer to lose the duel than back out at this late stage. The champions will then enter the dueling ring and perform rituals, such as meditation, to prepare their minds. Duelists of the Kakita tradition will stay their blade in its saya, proclaiming their name, ancestors, and sensei. Crab samurai might put on their armor, while Mirumoto may choose to use two blades instead of one.

FIRST STEP: ASSESSMENT

Both duelists will take up the Center Stance, and prepare any katas they know for the duel. Each participant will assess the other (Iaijutsu/ Awareness, against TN = 10 + 5 * enemy's insight rank). If successful, the duelist may determine one of the following about their enemy, with additional information possible (per raise):

- Opponent's Void
- Opponent's Reflexes
- Opponent's Iaijutsu skill
- Any Iaijutsu emphasizes the opponent knows
- The opponent's current Void (as Points)
- The opponent's current health (wound level)

If an assessment is stronger than an opponent's contest, the winner will have a stronger Focus phase (1k1 roll if Contested Assessment is won by 10 or more). At this point, a duelist may now concede and declare their enemy superior- though in a lethal duel this will still bear the consequences of losing. There is no reaction to the enemy (no Reaction Stage).

SECOND STEP: FOCUS

(Rolled with Iaijutsu/ Void). Both duelists will still be in Center Stance, and gain the stance's benefits (1k1 bonus to one roll, which may be used in Focus or Strike stage). This is a moment in time, with only school techniques specifically addressing iaijutsu applying (No techniques relying on Initiative, Turns, or Reactions can be used). Studying your opponent, a superior duelist will have the ability to make a first strike (made with a contested Focus roll 5 or higher than your opponent's). If neither duelist has a superior result, a karmic strike will result- destiny has intervened.

THIRD STEP: STRIKE

(Rolled with Iaijutsu/ Reflexes). The results of the Focus stage will empower the first strike, if there is one (1 free raise for every 5 above the contested roll, unless school techniques declare otherwise, made against the opponent's TN including applicable armor). The Feint maneuver may not be used in a strike. The attack is resolved normally, with damage being appropriately applied. The other champion may make their strike in a similar fashion, assuming they still live, with all applicable wound penalties. Striking after first blood in a non-lethal duel is considered extremely dishonorable, even by clans that think little of bushido. After all, if a challenged party is accidentally blinded by the first strike, then surely

no blame can attach to the victorious duelist, when such a challenge goes against the whole point of iaijutsu?

... Though her willingness to give up her life should be genuinely well-regarded. But I digress.

When a kharmic strike occurs, both parties will make their strikes simultaneously, doing appropriate damage without the attack being hindered by damage. In a duel to first blood, the result is a draw: neither party has won or lost, and the matter which started the duel is considered resolved. In a lethal duel, both parties will now treat the duel as a skirmish until one dies (rolling for initiative and proceeding as a normal fight, with both parties having Center Stance benefits in the first round).

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS ON DUELING

As dueling is the most noble of arts, "practice" duels are not done outside the sensei/ pupil relationship. All duels are a serious matter of life and honor, and to challenge frivolously is very distasteful. Only do kata or kenjutsu demonstrations when sparring in a dojo, if you must use steel.

Do not champion other clans without considering the consequences. Sending a champion to defend one of another clan is a sign of political allegiance, no matter how minor, and can have dire ramifications. Whether the duel is won or not, defeating and especially killing other samurai can result in future troubles for your clan generally, if not on the resolved issue. Such an approach is considered blatantly mercenary, even by the Mantis Clan.

Winning always has consequences. I know of a Winter Court in which a young man with no particular history of victorious dueling managed to kill an elite warrior duelist, gaining himself considerable amount of glory and regard in the eyes of society. Where that regard took him is a tale for a different time. By contrast, a young woman of the same clan was admired as one of the strongest duelists at the court, with a prestigious betrothal and all assistance from her superiors. She lost her death duel despite all expectations, and both she and the courtier who she championed paid with their lives. You may trust my sincerity: it was very, very, very sad.

Yet perhaps it was a blessing. You see, what she did not know was that her clan had relentlessly antagonized their rivals with their dueling, and that the rival clan was planning to kill her and her delegation head to declare: "Message Received." In a world where a few clans use dueling to force through their political agenda, without regard for partnerships and deserved respect, others will see to less pleasant methods of exerting their will.

Isn't it fun to watch people gamble when they don't know they're gambling?

I hope this guide has opened your eyes to the nature of dueling. May it influence you as it has influenced me.

Signed,
Anonymous