

# **Kingdom of Gleann Abhann**

## **Rapier Combat Rules**



Last Update  
October 5, 2014

## **PREFACE**

One of the things I love most about SCA combat is that there are no referees. Each participant is expected to behave with honor and courtesy at all times.

Still, rules are necessary, to ensure the safety of all participants and to a lesser degree to keep us focused on rapier, the art that drew us all in the first place. But rules must strike a balance between competing objectives: Tighter restrictions might yield marginally more safety, but may cost the fencer in terms of money, discomfort, or the joy of the fight. And some may wish fencing to be restricted to recreating the formal duel of honor, while others want the full range of combat in which rapiers might remotely have been involved.

The balance chosen by Corpora and by Gleann Abhann is to keep the rules as simple as possible, and rely on the intelligence and honor of our fencers. This means there is plenty of room to quibble over details, to seek small advantages through loopholes and ambiguities. Fortunately, this Kingdom has rarely had to deal with this type of fencer; we have instead been more interested in measuring ourselves by our skill with the blade. For this I am deeply grateful.

As fencers of Gleann Abhann, you are charged with having fun, fighting well, and always exercising your common sense, consideration, and

Honor above all.

Aethan Dunmire, CQB  
Gleann Abhann Kingdom Rapier Marshal

## **Introduction**

The purpose of these rules is to establish a consistent and easily understood convention of rapier combat within the Kingdom of Gleann Abhann that complies with Society-wide standards established and maintained by the Society Rapier Marshal.

Rules are designed to promote safe standards of rapier combat. However, no matter how clear or accurate, rules cannot replace common sense, good judgment and concern for the participants. If a question arises when applying these standards, choose the solution that promotes the greatest degree of safety for all participants.

## **Rules of Combat**

### **General Information**

1. Rapier combat shall be conducted in accordance with the Rules of the Lists of the SCA, Inc., The Corporate Rapier Rules and these rules.
2. All combatants, prior to every combat or practice, shall ensure their equipment and protective gear is safe, in good working order and has been inspected by a member of the Kingdom Marshallate authorized to perform rapier inspections.
3. Participants from out of kingdom shall comply with society standards for protective gear but shall adhere to Gleann Abhann weapons standards
4. Unless otherwise specified by Kingdom Law, the Crown's representative on the field and in all matters dealing with rapier combat shall be the Earl Marshal, then the Kingdom Rapier Marshal, then by delegation members of the Kingdom Rapier Marshallate.

### **Behavior on the Field**

1. All fighters shall obey the commands of the marshals overseeing the field. Fighters who do not obey the commands of the marshals or who otherwise conduct themselves in an unsafe manner will be removed from the field and subject to further disciplinary action.
2. Disagreements with the marshals overseeing the field shall be resolved through the established mechanisms outlined in the Marshallate Procedures of the SCA, Inc.
3. This is a re-creation of combat, and as such its participants may experience heightened levels of aggression and competitiveness. Therefore, each participant shall maintain an awareness of this possibility and control his or her temper and behavior at all times.
4. Deliberately striking an opponent with excessive force or with deliberate intent to injure is strictly forbidden, and shall be cause for revocation of one's privileges to participate.

5. Upon hearing *any* call of “**HOLD**” all combat shall immediately cease. Combatants shall first freeze in place, then check their immediate surroundings for hazards. Combatants shall then assume a non-threatening posture with their weapons pointing away from opponents and marshals (such as at the ground). In melee situations, a non-threatening posture is defined as resting on one knee with the fighter grasping their weapon at the hilt, the point of the weapon on the ground. **In melee situations, only marshals who are overseeing the field may remain standing when a hold is called.**
6. Conduct obstructive of normal rapier combat, such as consistent ignoring of blows, deliberate abuse of the rules (calling “HOLD” when pressed, etc.), or the like is forbidden.

## Use of Weapons and Parrying Devices

1. Successful attacks shall consist of thrusts with the point of the blade and cuts with the edge. A draw cut requires any part of the edge or tip of the blade being drawn with **firm and continuous pressure** in a pulling motion of a reasonable length and placement to simulate significant harm. Only the deliberate action of placing the blade and drawing a significant distance to show intent and technique should be acknowledged.
  - a. Chopping or hacking blows are never permitted. Fast circular movements (such as moulinets) may be made to place a blade for a cut.
  - b. Percussive tip cuts may only be used in Cut and Thrust rapier. Percussive cuts must always be delivered with sufficient control so as not to injure the opponent while still delivering the necessary impact for a valid cut.
  - c. Draw cuts are not permitted with spears.
2. Parrying devices may be used to move, deflect, or immobilize an opponent’s weapon or parrying device, so long as such use does not pose a danger to any combatant.
  - a. Striking an opponent with any part of a weapon or parrying device not approved for that purpose is not allowed.
  - b. When cloaks are used, a “HOLD” will be called should the cloak become entangled about either fighter, or about any weapon in such a manner that the weapon cannot be withdrawn. A “HOLD” is not required if the cloak is merely near the face, deflecting a weapon or loosely draped over or weighing a weapon down.
3. Grappling is forbidden. This includes grasping an opponent or the opponent’s equipment (this does not include grasping the opponent’s blade, which will be addressed later in these rules), punching, tripping, wrestling and or pushing the opponent. This does *not* preclude sweeping moves made with the intention of clearing an opponent’s blade(s) from on guard or the intention of preventing a draw cut.
4. Any combatant who is disarmed or who drops a weapon must be able to immediately draw another weapon or (in the case of a melee) acquire a weapon from an ally or that combatant must immediately yield. **No hold will be called.** His or her opponent may exploit this earned advantage with no loss of honor or may elect to allow the fighter to retrieve a weapon, at their discretion.

5. Parries may be performed with weapons, parrying devices, the gloved hand or any part of the body. Though the gloved hand may be used to parry, it may not be used to grasp or strike an opponent. Fleeting contact between opponents is allowed, as long as no grappling, deliberate striking, or other unsafe behavior occurs.
6. A combatant may grasp an opponent's blade as a defensive measure. Any movement of the blade within the grip will be counted as a loss of the grasping combatant's hand. No grappling or wrestling over the weapon is allowed. The grip may only be maintained long enough to move an opponent's blade off line or to deliver an immediate counter attack.

## **Acknowledgement of Blows**

1. Unless otherwise specifically defined, such as "armor as worn" (metal breastplate, steel gorget, helm, period style mail glove, etc.) all fighters are presumed to be wearing common civil attire of the period, not armor.
2. The entire body, front and back, is considered legal target area. "Death from behind" as in melees is not allowed unless specified in a given scenario. In one-on-one combat an opponent who exposes his or her back (as in a spin or through any other maneuver) may receive a legal blow to their back.
3. Blows struck will be considered as though they had been struck with a real rapier with an extremely sharp point and edge. Any blow that would have penetrated the skin (you feel *any* pressure behind the point) shall be considered a good blow. Any blow that strikes a mask, gorget, or helm shall be considered as though it had struck flesh. Fighters shall keep in mind that a "live" tip would not glance or skip off without having caused damage.
4. A good thrust or draw cut to the head, neck, torso, groin, a hand's breadth to the inside of the thigh from the groin, or a hand's breadth to the inside of the arm from the armpit shall be considered incapacitating or a "kill".
5. A good blow to the arm shall disable that arm for all purposes of attack and defense. A good blow to the hand shall disable that hand. The arm may still be used, with the hand held in a loose fist. A second blow to that hand or to that arm shall disable that arm.
6. A good blow to the foot or leg will disable that entire leg. The struck opponent must fight from either a sitting or kneeling position. Circling an opponent who has lost their leg(s) is not permitted; the standing fighter must stay within their opponent's forward 120-degree arc.
7. If an effective blow is thrown before or at the same moment as an event that would stop a fight (a "HOLD" being called, the fighter being "killed" himself, etc.) the blow shall still count. A blow thrown after such an event shall not count.

# Weapons and Equipment

## General

1. All equipment must be in good repair so as to resist tears, punctures, breakage or otherwise stand up to the stresses of combat.
2. Sharp points, edges or corners will not be allowed on any equipment.
3. Blades shall not have nicks, pits or any jagged edge that might snag on an opponent's armor or equipment or weaken the blade.
4. Any equipment that has a likelihood of breaking a blade or damaging equipment, either through design or repeated mishap, shall not be allowed.

## Weapons

1. Acceptable weapons are heavy rapiers, daggers, cut and thrust blades, spears, and rubber band guns (RBG's). Epees and "flexi-daggers" are not allowed.
2. All blades approved for use in the SCA for heavy rapier or Cut and Thrust rapier are legal for use in Gleann Abhann, except as listed in Appendix 1 of these rules. Blades will be specified as to which type of rapier combat they are allowed for. Some blades may be allowed in more than one type of rapier combat so care must be taken by the fighters as to agree on which set of rules (i.e. which category of rapier combat) apply to each bout.
3. Blades will not be altered by grinding, cutting, heating, hammering or other actions that could significantly alter their temper, flexibility or durability. Normal combat stresses and blade care do not violate this rule. Exceptions are:
  - a. The tang of the weapon may be altered.
  - b. Rapier blades may be shortened so long as such an alteration does not make them too stiff.
4. All blades must be reasonably flexible. Rigid steel "parrying-only" daggers such as those made from cut down blades will not be allowed.
5. All blade tips must be capped with rubber, plastic or leather.
  - a. Tips will have a flat striking surface of at least 3/8 inch (9mm) diameter.
  - b. Caps must be firmly taped or glued in place.
  - c. The cap must be of a color that contrasts with the blade in such a manner that its absence will be readily apparent. If tape is used its color must contrast with both blade and cap.
6. Any blade with kinks, sharp bends or cracks shall not be used. Steel blades that develop such defects cannot be repaired and must be retired.
7. Weapons may be equipped with a cup hilt, swept hilt or quillions and knucklebow. The ends of quillions must be blunt and at least 1/4 inch in diameter.
8. Orthopedic or "pistol" grips will not be allowed unless a given fighter has written permission from the Kingdom Rapier Marshal for medical reasons. Such approval will only be granted with supporting documentation from an individual's healthcare provider.

## Spears / Polearms

1. All weapons which are not configured and used in a manner that a marshal would identify as a "sword" and are either longer than 60" overall or with a handle longer than 18" are defined as belonging to this category of weapon
2. Use:
  - a. These weapons can only be used in Heavy Rapier and Cut and Thrust combat. They may be used only for thrusting in Heavy Rapier combat; draw or tip cuts are not permitted.
  - b. Use of this type of weapon requires a separate authorization.
  - c. Combatants who use this type of weapon may only strike opponents with the blade of the weapon.
  - d. For single tournament combat, this type of weapon is considered a non-standard device. An opponent may decline to face a non-standard device without forfeiting a bout.
  - e. A fighter using this type of weapon must have both hands on the weapon and in the same positions from the beginning to the end of the attack. Invalid attacks include "pool cuing", sliding, completely releasing the haft and any other process that reduces a fighter's control of the weapon.
  - f. A fighter may not "set" this weapon by bracing the base in the ground or against the foot or body, or locking the back arm.
  - g. Offensive and defensive secondaries may not be used with a spear.
  - h. When wounded in the arm, a fighter must safely remove the spear from the combat area, then may draw another weapon or (in the case of a melee) acquire a weapon from an ally, or that combatant must immediately yield. **No hold will be called.**
3. Approved designs:
  - a. Total weapon length shall not exceed 8 feet.
  - b. The minimum blade length is 36" measured tip to the top of the tang.
  - c. Total weapon weight shall not exceed 3 pounds.
  - d. The only weapons in this class that are approved for use must be similar in design to the commercially available Alchem pike and Amazonia spear. Blades must meet blade flexibility standard (*SCA Rapier Marshals Handbook*, Appendix 1.B.).
  - e. Non-commercially produced designs must meet the blade flexibility standard and also must have the blade securely attached to the haft by mechanical means (i.e. screws or pins). Weapons of this design must be approved by the Kingdom Rapier Marshal or a designated deputy before being used on the field.
  - f. Hafts must be composed of pine, cedar, hardwood, or rattan.
  - g. No weapon may have a cutting surface at both ends.
  - h. Any other designs, including non-steel blade designs, must be submitted through the approved experimental process (*SCA Rapier Marshals Handbook*, Appendix 2).

## **Parrying Devices**

1. Standard parrying devices shall consist of:
  - a. Shields, canes, and other rigid secondaries. It is suggested that rigid secondaries may be up to 453sq. inches in area (the same area as a 24" round) but not more than 48" in any dimension to make them consistent with standards allowed in Gulf Wars. Oversize parrying devices may be considered 'non-standard' at the discretion of the marshal.
  - b. Scabbards made of lightweight break resistant material such as ABS type PVC or similar material shall have the end facing an opponent capped or plugged to prevent blade trapping.
  - c. Soft, non-rigid devices such as cloaks may be made of cloth, foam, leather and similar materials. Cloaks may be of any size or shape. They may be weighted with soft material such as rope or rolled cloth; they shall not be weighted with any rigid material nor with materials which are heavy enough to turn the device into a flail or impact weapon. Any weights or stiffening must be designed in such a manner as to pose no risk to any combatant. Cloaks may be wrapped about the user's arm to protect from draw cuts only on the arm covered by the cloak. Cloaks may be thrown or used to temporarily obstruct an opponent's view of the fighter.
2. Use of non-standard parrying devices (such as offensive bucklers) shall be at the discretion of the marshal(s) overseeing the field and with the consent of one's opponent.
3. Items that would predictably cause entanglement of an opponent or their weapon, either by design or repeated mishap are prohibited.

## **Projectile Weapons**

1. Throwing weapons and RBG's may be used in melee combat only.
2. The use of such weapons will only be allowed in situations where spectators may be separated from the fighting field by at least the range of any projectile weapon being used. RBGs shall not be loaded until those in the vicinity are wearing eye protection.
3. RBG's may be constructed of any material that is appropriate to the weapon being simulated. As with all other equipment, no sharp points or edges will be allowed.
4. An RBG may be used as a rigid parrying device during combat. An accidental discharge has the potential to hit a combatant and in such a case should be considered as a valid hit. Note that one may be wounded or "killed" in such a manner by one's own weapon or by an ally's weapon.
5. Damage from a projectile weapon should be considered in the same manner as a thrust, but should also assume realistic consequences. Example a shot to a buckler would at least cause the loss of that arm. Marshals may decide on appropriate consequences and announce them before combat begins.

# Protective Gear

## Definitions, in order of increasing resistance:

1. Abrasion resistant material – material that will withstand normal combat stresses, such as being snagged by an unbroken blade, without tearing. Examples include but are not limited to:
  - a. Broadcloth
  - b. A single layer of heavy poplin cloth (35% cotton, 65% polyester)
  - c. “Trigger” cloth
  - d. Sweat pants
  - e. Opaque cotton
  - f. Poly-cotton or lycra/spandex tights
2. Puncture resistant – any fabric or combination of fabrics that will predictably withstand puncture. Examples include but are not limited to:
  - a. Four ounce leather (2mm)
  - b. Four layers of heavy poplin cloth
  - c. Ballistic nylon rated to at least 550 NewtonsKevlar is **not** an acceptable material.
3. Rigid material – puncture resistant material that will not significantly flex, spread apart or deform under pressure of 12 KG applied by a standard mask tester applied repeatedly to any single point. Examples include:
  - a. 22 gauge stainless steel
  - b. 20 gauge mild steel
  - c. 16 gauge aluminum, copper or brass
  - d. One layer of heavy leather (8 ounce or 4mm)

**The following are Kingdom minimums for protective gear. Individuals desiring additional protection are free to pursue such. It is advised that individuals weigh the potential benefits of more rigorous protection against the risks of heat illness, exhaustion and stroke due to heavier and more confining clothing. An individual must also retain the ability to accurately acknowledge blows, despite any additional protection worn.**

## General

1. **There shall be no bare skin showing at any time.**
2. There shall be no gaps between separate articles of clothing, regardless of stance or movement.

## **Head and Neck**

1. The front and top of the head must be covered by rigid material to below the jaw line and behind the ears. Standard 12 Kg fencing masks meet this requirement. Fencing helms built to this standard are also acceptable.
2. The face must be covered by either 12 Kg mesh or perforated metal. Such metal must not have holes larger than 1/8 inch in diameter, with a minimum offset of 3/16 inch and shall also meet the definition of rigid material.
3. Masks and helms must be secured to the fighter so that they may not easily be dislodged during combat. The combination of a snug fit and the spring-tongue in a conventional fencing mask is *not* sufficient to secure the mask.
4. Both modern fencing masks and rapier helms, when inspected, shall comply with the rigid material standard provisions on facial coverage and shall show no evidence of impending failure (e.g., rust which weakens the metal involved, dents or other defects which spread open the mesh, broken weld points, etc.). If concern exists about the mesh of a modern fencing mask it should be subjected to a test with a standard 12 Kg mask punch by a qualified marshal.
5. The rest of the head and neck must be covered by at least puncture resistant material, as in a hood or arming cap.
6. The throat and cervical vertebrae shall be covered by a gorget constructed of rigid material backed by either puncture resistant material or 1/4 inch of open-cell foam.

## **Torso and Other Killing Zones**

1. The entire torso (chest, back, abdomen, groin, and sides up to and including the armpits) must be covered with puncture resistant material.
2. Acceptable minimum armpit coverage is provided by a triangle of puncture resistant material extending from the armpit seam, covering the lower half of the sleeve at the seam and extending down the inner/under arm one third the distance to the fighter's elbow.
3. Male fighters shall wear rigid groin protection. Any ventilation holes (as in a cup) large enough to admit a broken blade must be covered from the outside by at least puncture resistant material.
4. Female fighters shall wear puncture resistant groin protection.

## **Arms and Legs**

1. Hands shall be protected by gloves made of abrasion resistant material that overlap any sleeve openings by at least 2 inches, regardless of stance or movement.
2. Feet shall be protected by boots, shoes or sandals made of at least abrasion resistant material. No blatantly modern footwear will be allowed.
3. Abrasion resistant material shall be required on the arms and legs and anywhere else not specifically addressed in these rules.

## Rules of the List

1. All fighters are expected to be aware of and familiar with “The Rules of the Lists of the Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc.”.
2. At least one warranted marshal is required to oversee the field for any tournament, duel or melee and at least one Rapier Marshal in Training for any other combat (i.e., practice).
3. Fighters may only engage when the overseeing marshal has received *verbal* acknowledgment of readiness from all combatants and has then given the command to begin.
4. Marshals may use the term “edge of the world” or “matte” to warn combatants when they are approaching the edge of the field. **No “HOLD” has been called in such an instance.** Fighters are to cease movement towards the edge of the field, however a fighter need not give up an earned advantage unless ordered by the marshal to “center up”.

## Melee Considerations

In melee scenarios fighters are engaged with all opponents immediately upon the command to lay on.

1. Fighters may strike any opponent with any legal blow so long as they are within that opponent’s front 180-degree arc, and that opponent has a reasonable ability to be aware of their presence (i.e. eye contact has been made or a loud, clear verbal challenge has been issued). A fighter may not strike an opponent from behind.
2. In some scenarios, “Death from behind” may be allowed. To properly perform a death from behind, a fighter shall lay his or her weapon, to a third of the blade, upon the opponent’s shoulder and in a clear voice call “Dead, m’lord” (or some other short, courteous notification). Spearmen must have one hand on the collar of the spear. Reaching around the opponent’s neck shall not be allowed in any circumstance. The opponent shall be considered “dead” from the moment the blade was laid on, and may not spin, duck, dodge away or otherwise attempt to engage their killer in any manner, including ‘death throes’. A fighter who deliberately ignores an attacker behind them, or who maneuvers to keep their back to an opponent to avoid an engagement may be considered to be abusing the rules.
3. There may be special scenarios in which marshals may find it necessary to apply additional restrictions, at their discretion.
4. In some scenarios marshals may allow special tactics, such as assisting a legged comrade to move. In no case shall such tactics be allowed if they present a valid safety concern.
5. When “dead,” combatants shall raise their weapon(s) above their head (spearmen shall hold the spear vertically in front of the body with both hands, blade down), and immediately leave the field, except in scenarios where the “dead” are to remain where they have fallen.
6. Cut and Thrust is not allowed in Melees.

## **Authorizations**

There shall exist the following authorizations:

- Rapier – Allows use of a single rapier, in either hand.
- Secondaries - Allows use of a dagger, rigid parry (buckler, scabbard, cane, etc.), soft parry (cloak, hat, puppet, etc.), singly or in combination with the sword. Allows Case (two weapons of similar length).
- Spear – Allows use of a spear (requires special authorization)
- Cut and Thrust – Special weapons and period techniques (requires special authorization)

A fighter may use any combination of weapons for which he or she holds authorizations.

To Authorize, one must:

- Be at least 16 years of age.
- Read and become familiar with these rules.
- Have experienced some training in rapier combat.
- Present a current membership card for the SCA or must have a signed waiver on file with his or her Group Rapier Marshal and present a copy to the Kingdom Authorization Deputy Rapier Marshal.
- Successfully complete an Authorization Exam performed by a warranted Gleann Abhann Rapier Authorization Marshal.

## **Appendix I: Approved Blades**

All blades approved for use by the Deputy Society Rapier Marshal shall also be legal for use in Gleann Abhann provided they meet the following criteria. No other blades may be used by any individual for any combat purpose unless done so by approval from the Deputy Society Rapier Marshal and written permission from the Kingdom Rapier Marshal.

### **Flexibility**

Any blade used in rapier combat must pass the flexibility testing described in section 1.B of the appendix to the Society Rapier Combat Handbook. With the weapon held horizontally and supported at the hilt only, a 6-ounce weight is hung one inch or less from the tip. The blade must be deflected by the following amounts.

Dagger: 1 inch

Rapier and Cut & Thrust: ½ inch

In addition, Rapier blades must also be able to flex more than 45 degrees and return to their original alignment.

Blades which do not meet these criteria may not be used in any rapier activity in Gleann Abhann.

### **Restricted Blades**

The blade types below may not be used in any Gleann Abhann rapier activities:

Bud K blades, all types

Foil, epee, or saber blades used in modern Olympic-style fencing

Flexi-dagger dagger blades