



FULL METAL FRIDAYS

We at Privateer Press are very excited that Iron Kingdoms Full Metal Fantasy Roleplaying Game: Kings, Nations, and Gods releases later this year. To celebrate, we're counting down to launch day with free new RPG content every Friday! From now until launch, you'll be able to download new careers, equipment, monsters, and more on Full Metal Fridays. Each month will showcase a different theme and will culminate in an event Game Masters can drop right into games. This month, Full Metal Fridays will examine the role of dueling in the Iron Kingdoms.

Check back every Friday for new Iron Kingdoms RPG content!

INSTALLMENT 5, WEEK 2: INCORPORATING DUELING INTO A GAME

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Although dueling has a place in the Iron Kingdoms, it does not fit into every situation and should not be used to resolve every disagreement that arises. For example, in high society the entire process of a duel from the time of the initial challenge to the resolution of the combat can take up to a week, making a duel a poor choice for quickly resolving a conflict.

It is also important to remember a duel is a combat that follows an established set of rules, not just any time two characters have a fight.

WHEN TO DUEL

As the Game Master, the first thing to consider when deciding if a duel is an appropriate response to a situation is the parties involved in the altercation. Among the upper levels of society in the Iron Kingdoms dueling

is an appropriate recourse to an affront, but not every conflict escalates to combat. If someone has given offense unknowingly, the matter can be resolved simply by the offer and acceptance of an apology. If the issue is not directly related to a matter of honor, such as in the case of two nobles with a business dispute, the participants are just as likely to try and settle their disagreement with negotiation as they are to resort to a duel. The only time a duel is sure to be unavoidable is if the conflict involves the honor of one of the parties, for instance if one is accused of being a coward.

Along with considering the culture of the parties in question, also consider their stations in life. Although it is common for duels to take place between gentlemen in Ord, for example, organized duels are less common among the lower classes of that kingdom, who prefer to answer slights on family honor with an immediate unregulated brawl. When the

poor or criminal elements of the Iron Kingdoms resolve a dispute with violence, there are rarely any rules involved. It is also considered inappropriate to challenge a member of a significantly lower class to a duel, and anyone can ignore a challenge without damage to his reputation if the challenger is from a significantly lower standing. A player can, of course, choose to ignore these customs.

SETTING UP A DUEL

The Llaeese dueling code, The Duello, has been widely adopted as the standard set of rules for dueling across the Iron Kingdoms. It establishes protocols governing a number of aspects of dueling, though some are taken more literally than others. For instance, traditionally it was a rare member of the Llaeese aristocracy who did not keep a professional duelist among his retainers. Many refugee Llaeese nobles now living in Ord and Cygnar have found it difficult to continue paying the fees of these professional duelists, which has contributed to a larger number of skilled killers looking for employment.

Whatever the cause, the first part of a duel is the challenge. After an incident worthy of a duel has occurred a public challenge must be given, and then there must be sufficient time allowed for the challenged individual to offer an apology. If an apology is offered and accepted, the honor of both parties is preserved without the need for confrontation. On occasion, however, the injured party is eager to meet on the dueling ground and will refuse all apologies made.

After a challenge has been accepted, both duelists choose their seconds. These seconds act as assistants, judges, and replacements if necessary, particularly if the duelists are of vastly disproportionate skill or physical ability. After seconds are chosen they confer to decide the terms of the duel. The challenged party chooses where the duel will occur, and the challenger chooses at what distance the duel will be fought. The seconds negotiate more specific details: the weapons to be used, the time the duel will begin, and so on. One of the most important aspects of the duel that must be decided are the terms of victory. The most common is first blood, but the duelists can also agree to fight until one party submits or is killed.

When the appointed time arrives, the parties meet at the chosen location. At this point there is still a chance that an apology can resolve the conflict. Once the challenged party takes his ground, however, no apology can prevent the duel. Finally, the seconds inspect the weapons to be used. If those are firearms, they are loaded in the presence of both seconds before this inspection.

When both seconds are satisfied by the weapons, the parties face off against each other. In a duel with melee weapons, combat is usually initiated after both parties have made it known that they are ready. When firearms are involved the terms of the duel are arranged to include whether both parties will fire at a signal such as the chiming of a nearby clock tower, at the call of a judge, or when they choose.

THE DUELLO

A challenge to duel must be issued publicly and chance given for an apology to be proffered. If the challenged gives no apology, the challenge is accepted. A challenge may be ignored should it be of a trivial nature or from a trivial person.

Challenges are never delivered at night, for it is desirable to proceed with grace and allow sufficient time for apology.

The challenged and the challenger must choose seconds of equal station to their own.

The challenged chooses the ground; the challenger chooses the distance; the seconds fix the time and terms of firing.

The challenged and the challenger decide upon the terms of victory, which are assumed to be the drawing of first blood unless otherwise specified.

Upon meeting at the ground, if the cause of the challenge is such that no apology or explanation can or will be received, the challenged takes his ground and calls on the challenger to proceed.

No apology can be received after the parties have taken the ground until there has been an exchange of fire or an engagement with blades.

The seconds load pistols or inspect blades in the presence of each other.

Firing may be regulated—first by signal; second by word of command; or third at pleasure, as is agreeable to the parties.

In all cases a misfire is equivalent to a shot.

Where seconds disagree and resolve to exchange shots themselves, it must be at the same time as the principals.

Once the terms of victory are met or if both principals can or will no longer continue, the seconds must attempt reconciliation. If the challenged will not accept reconciliation at this point, a second meeting must be arranged.

After the duel has started, the seconds act as judges to determine not only who has won the duel but also when the terms of honor have been met.

DELOPING

It is a common practice in a duel that is only being fought to save face for the participants to discharge their pistols at the ground and have their seconds declare that honor has been satisfied. This practice, known as deloping, permits duelists to preserve not only their honor, but also their lives. Deloping in a duel is a risky gambit, however: if the opponent does not also deign to do so, a duelist has essentially given his opponent a free shot at him.

THE QUICK-DRAW SHOWDOWN

A pistol duel is fought with the participants facing off against each other with pistols in hand and taking a shot at the agreed time. With the reduction of pistol cost due to advances in manufacturing over the last few centuries, there has been a growing trend for a new style of conflict resolution among gunmen that shares some similarities with dueling but does not follow its rules.

The quick-draw showdown is popular among the lower classes, in the wilder areas of western Immoren, and among the growing number of adventurers who consider themselves pistoliers. The object of the conflict is usually the resolution of an argument, but it can also simply be a test to see who is the more skilled combatant. For this showdown, the two gunmen face off with holstered weapons. The competition is a combination of intimidating the other participant, drawing weapons as quickly as possible, and making an accurate shot.

The characters first make a contested Intimidation roll. The loser of this roll suffers a -2 penalty to his Initiative. The characters then make initiative rolls and follow the standard rules for combat.

DUELING AMONG NON-HUMANS

The descriptions of dueling offered above focus on how dueling is handled in the human societies of Immoren, but dueling is also a regular aspect of other cultures. The approach to dueling and the specific customs surrounding it vary widely—most non-human races do not choose seconds for their duels, for example—but on the whole dueling is embraced as a sometimes necessary method for settling otherwise irreconcilable disputes.

IOS

Ios has an uncomfortable relationship with duels, which are technically illegal but still practiced among the aristocracy in particular. Historically the government has had limited success in interfering with the internal disputes of its myriad noble houses and their well-armed sons and daughters. Iosans approach these duels with great seriousness and have long employed them as a means to confront an accuser, settle a bitter rivalry, or resolve a matter quickly and privately and therefore avoid public scandal or dishonor to one's house. Despite the practice being considered slightly disreputable, victors earn a certain prestige.

Considerable ceremony accompanies these duels, which must include uninvolved parties bearing witness on both sides, these having a similar role as seconds in the human kingdoms. Duels are always conducted in secrecy, at a pre-established place and time. The weapons and method of the duel varies considerably and are determined ahead of time. Arcane duels are possible if both parties are skilled in such

arts, but most are fought with melee weapons. The notion of a duel with ranged weapons would never occur to most Iosans, as it undermines the private and personal nature of the clash.

Most of these duels are fought to first blood, but sometimes the participants agree to fight to the death. Accidental deaths also occur, of course. In the case of a death, the witnesses are tasked to bring word of the outcome to necessary friends and family. So long as the duel was conducted honorably there is an expectation that there will be no retaliation or legal consequences brought against the surviving party. Nonetheless, noble houses have sometimes harbored longstanding enmity over such fatalities.

Iosans living outside of that nation rarely initiate duels, but those born to certain families may be familiar with the practice. Duels between Iosans in human lands happen from time to time, kept as private and secret as those in Ios. Otherwise an Iosan's attitude toward the practice may vary depending on the nation in which he lives. An Iosan who has spent most of his life in Llael, for instance, may be entirely comfortable with the Code Duello and even become a professional duelist.

RHUL

The dwarves of Rhul have laws governing every aspect of their society, and dueling is no exception. As a matter of cultural tradition, any severe dispute can be resolved by martial effort, either as a larger feud between entire clans or as individual duels. These clashes are governed by rules so detailed and exacting that they are a standard area of specialization among legal experts in Rhul. In general, other avenues of reconciliation be exhausted before a duel is considered appropriate. A trade embargo against a rival clan might be appropriate, for instance, but if the other clan still refuses to submit, combat can then legally be employed. These clashes can take the form of a limited skirmish between clan warriors or can be decided by a duel of champions. At both the larger and smaller scales there are specific rules governing how these battles can begin, be conducted, and be resolved. Every effort is made to prevent larger duels from spilling over to uninvolved parties or otherwise disrupting ordinary business.

Although the rules governing the circumstances and structures of Rhulic duels and feuds are labyrinthine by non-Rhulic standards, the most complex of these stipulations are reserved for the larger clashes. Individual duels are more straightforward; Rhulic clan lords and warriors are generally conversant with the particulars and quickly come to an agreement in most cases. The laws pertinent to these contests focus on making them as fair as possible, such as by stipulating parity of weaponry and skill and by allowing for seconds and champions to fight by proxy. Witnesses are required for the outcome of a duel to carry the weight of law. On matters of importance, Rhulfolk prefer a priest be employed as witness and judge, as such individuals are fully versed in the legal and ritual procedures. If a duel involves members of the same clan, the clan lord may be invited to stand as judge instead of or in addition to a priest of the Great Fathers.

The duelists for a particular fight are usually chosen so as to take the best advantage of the agreement reached for that duel; often the only stake the participants themselves have in the fight is the honor of their clan. Because the Rhulfolk place particular importance on clan loyalty, however, every clan can choose from among a wealth of volunteers for such duels. It is not uncommon for complex duels to be arranged for involving multiple combatants, or several in a row. These are still considered duels so long as the fighting is one-on-one in each case.

When a dispute goes beyond small groups to involve two or more entire clans, it is deemed a feud. Feuds can be employed to determine the outcome of major contract disputes, including the rights to significant construction projects or other lucrative work. A clan's fortune's can easily rise or fall based on the outcome of a feud, and so entire well-armed clan forces, including steamjacks, can be dispatched to wage them. Although organized similarly to smaller duels, feuds may require the witnessing presence of higher authorities such as moot judges, who represent the Moot of the Hundred Houses in Ghord. It is the priority of a moot judge to ensure that feuds do not escalate or destroy protected property, such as important buildings. All decisions of a moot judge are final and binding, becoming law.

Clan lords can earn considerable acclaim and honor by interceding to end a long-standing feud by personal combat against their rival clan lord, although most such matches can be decided by proxy champions. A duel of this nature carries considerable risk, particularly for the clan with military superiority. Some smaller clans are adroit at leveraging challenges of honor to force an otherwise more powerful adversary into a position where they would lose respect and prestige by refusing a personal duel. Similarly, a moot judge can force a one-on-one duel between clan champions to quickly resolve a feud that has escalated and begun to threaten the public peace.

SKORNE

A large portion of the population of the Skorne Empire is made up of members of the warrior caste, who live by the *hoksune* code. One of the core philosophies of this code states that a true warrior truly lives only while risking his life in combat. Additionally warriors are taught to beware the path of least resistance and to seek the harder path in order to reap the benefits of the obstacles they must overcome. To a skorne warrior, every injury and every minute of pain is a lesson that allows them to forge their strength.

To understand the skorne outlook on dueling one must understand the caste system. Very regimented, this system offers many opportunities for an individual to find insult in the actions or words of anyone who is a member of his own or a lower caste. Honor is a vitally important concept to the warriors of the skorne and is bound up in one's duty to one's caste, house, and superiors as well as in personal adherence to *hoksune*. Killing another over a perceived insult or challenge to one's honor is perfectly acceptable and proper behavior. Peers consider the death of a combatant as an affirmation of his weakness and the end of the matter.

Along with the emphasis on mastery of weapons, which are worn at all times, these aspects of skorne culture contribute to an environment where dueling is a major part of life. A challenge to fight may be offered and answered between skorne warriors even without any perceived slight or insult, purely to test the mettle and prowess of a peer or a subordinate. As a matter of honor these fights are not to the death, but they can still result in bloodshed and injury. The need to answer insults or overt challenges of honor might prompt an immediate duel, with the drawing of weapons and a clash begun at once and with little ritual.

More important and severe challenges, such as aspersions on house leaders or high-ranking officers, might result in formal duels at a specific time and location, and these are usually attended by any house members with an interest in the outcome. Most significant houses have a fighting arena set aside for this purpose as well as fighting instruction and sparring between house leaders and officers. When a duel is arranged, it is most common for the participants to wield whichever weapon they are most familiar with. In cases where a clearly superior combatant faces an inferior, the more skilled warrior may gain the respect of his peers by putting aside familiar weapons to employ those with which he is less comfortable.

The most ritualized duels in skorne society occur yearly during the Trials of the Aspirant Praetorians. During this time young skorne who hope to join the ranks of a great house's Praetorians participate in numerous sword duels to prove themselves worthy of the honor of membership.

Vinter Raelthorne's conquest of the skorne was greatly aided by the significance they place on dueling. As he traveled across the skorne empire toward Halaak, Vinter subjugated house after house by defeating their lords and champions in duels and absorbing their military strength into his own force. His last act as supreme archdominar has already become legend, whereby he single-handedly defeated an entire room of tyrants and dominars, including killing several with their own weapons.

THARN

Among the savage Tharn, duels are less structured and far more brutal. Power among these tribes is usually determined by who is strongest and fiercest, a status that is hard won through many bloody conflicts. When a tribe's leader begins to show age or weakness, for example, it is not long before he begins facing challenges from its younger members.

A typical Tharn duel begins with the challenger calling to the challenged, boasting of his own prowess while casting doubt on the abilities of the challenged. The challenged can continue this verbal exchange, but often the response is a roar of rage as both parties channel the Devourer and then violently clash. There is no special area set aside for these conflicts, which can range through the village in a frenzied path of destruction.

The fight usually ends once one of the combatants demonstrates clear dominance over the other. A duel can certainly be fought to the death, though, and the victor may decide to kill his adversary to make an example of him, particularly in duels for tribal leadership. Due to the brutal nature of Tharn fighting, it is not uncommon for combatants (and sometimes observers) to suffer grievous injuries in these clashes. A Tharn can find his place in the tribe significantly lowered if he is maimed, and the standing of any combatant who begs for mercy is permanently damaged.

TROLLKIN

Dueling is an accepted way to deal with many disagreements in trollkin society, and combatants gain and lose influence and reputation based not only on victories and losses but also on a complex assessment of the contest and their performance in it. Whatever the purpose of the duel, it takes place at the kriel's *kuar*, a huge stone platform in the center of the village that serves as both a gathering place for the kriel and an arena to settle scores through confrontation.

Trollkin usually fight their duels with whatever weapon they are most familiar with. The most common choices are axes and hammers, but any weapon is considered acceptable, and more than one trollkin has made a point of spurning weapons altogether to fight bare-handed. Regardless of the weapon chosen, combatants are expected to fight honorably, and the numerous spectators intervene if cheating is suspected. In most of these clashes, forcing an opponent off the platform grants victory to the one remaining.

While melee duels are the most common and exciting for spectators, trollkin leaders sometimes use other means to best one another either atop the *kuar* or anywhere the kin can gather in number to witness. Direct feats of strength and stamina such as arm-wrestling or drinking may be undertaken by two trollkin to take the measure of the other. Shamans, elders, fell callers, and chroniclers may face one another for a verbal duel, an intense debate involving heated words along with tricks of oratory, seeking to not only prove their position but also sway those listening. Losing one of these duels can be just as severe to a trollkin's standing as a loss by weapons, as being shamed or proven foolish can unseat a chieftain. There is also a variant of the *Tohmaak Mahkeiri* ceremony whereby two trollkin stand close and stare into one another's eyes, trying to force the other to back down by sheer force of will. This ceremony has superstitious and mystical overtones among the trollkin, who claim participants can peer into the soul of the other and gauge their true worth. Long minutes or even hours can pass in such a mental confrontation; if it becomes clear to both that they are deadlocked, a physical duel will commence to settle the matter.

It is common practice for the younger members of a trollkin community to take part in many duels to establish a reputation. It is also not unheard of for leaders in the community to face off to resolve a conflict that cannot be decided by other means. In his rise to power Hoarluk Doomshaper challenged countless elders to duels, both physical and mental, and was never defeated.