

A basic primer on the use of the cloak and rapier

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I would like to dedicate this to:

Portia, Pierre, and Lilly

thank you

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.Introduction:

Out of all of the fencing forms practiced in the Society, the most misused and misunderstood form is cloak. Many fencers feel that it is too slow to be effective against the "faster forms". When cloak is done improperly, it is next to useless. All too often a bout between a cloak fighter and a skilled opponent becomes a timing game. Who ever figures out the pattern first, wins. When the fencer applies planning and training to the cloak it becomes a very effective form. As with all of the combat arts, it is the combatant that fails not the form. The more you train the better you will be.

Cloak is dependent on learning a variety of maneuvers that can be applied quickly from a neutral position. While a fencer should be able to throw a maneuver from any position, it is important to keep in mind that the closer to a neutral position you are, the less chance there is of telegraphing your moves. This should be kept in mind while doing drill work.

The purpose of this manual is to give a fencer an idea of the possibilities that cloak offers. The maneuvers contained here in are the basic foundation for any cloak work. It is up to the individual fencer to determine what works for them. Advanced techniques are often created through experimentation. No manual can work as a substitute for practice.

Rules:

There are a few rules to keep in mind when working with cloak. The sources for this information comes from the policies of the Marshal of fence for the East Kingdom, and answers to direct questions from the East kingdom martial of fence. Section III. Subsection D. cloaks

- 1. Cloak size, shape, and weight are left to the discretion of the user, subject to the condition that it actually be wearable as a cloak.
- 2. Hem weights are permitted, but shall be padded. Rigid weights, such as bars, rods, chain, or strips of metal are prohibited.
- 3. The cloak may be used to entangle an opponent's weapon. It may not be used against parts of the body.
- 4. Cloaks will be allowed to take multiple hits without being considered to have sustained ruinous damage to the fabric. However, if the marshal sees things getting out of hand, he or she may step in and advise the fencer that the cloak is no longer useful. A thrust or a cut will penetrate a cloak and do damage to the fencer.

One thing that is a default to the heavy weapons rule is that you can not throw the cloak in the list. You can not relinquish control of your weapon. That means that you can not throw it as a distraction or let go of it once you have covered your opponents blade. You have to maintain control of the weapon at all times. Yes, the cloak is a weapon. It is listed under section three: "Weapons Specifications" in the policies of the marshal of fence for the East Kingdom.

Strengths and weaknesses:

What makes cloak so special? A cloak in the right hands is an extremely effective, and devastating weapon. It has many advantages that counter act the strengths of other forms. Keep in mind that these same strengths can quickly become weaknesses if mis-applied.

The cloak can be considered one of the most versatile forms. It can be used like a buckler in terms of deflection. It can aggressively trap and control your opponents blade like case or dagger. The trouble starts when a fencer gets too caught up in the tricks and loses sight of the bout at hand.

Flexibility is an inherent factor in cloak. With it you can entangle and control your opponents attack. The cloak's ability to wrap and cover is one of its primary strengths. Flexibility becomes a weakness when you entangle yourself or lose control of the cloak. A cloak will wrap around anything that it comes in contact with whether it is a blade, an arm or your own leg.

The weight of a cloak can drag an incoming attack down, out of line. The weight can also securely trap a blade. The opponent will have to deal with both the weight of the sword and the cloak. The drawback is the heavier the cloak, the faster you will tire out. As you tire your defense slows and it becomes that much harder to function.

Weight and momentum combine together to create moments of rigidity. This can stop a blade dead. This can be very effective when jamming an opponents attack. However as stated earlier, it is an equation: mass and momentum together. You have to be in motion in order to get anything out of it. This can lead to patterning and telegraphing.

As a fencer practices and drills with these strengths and weaknesses in mind, they will become aware of where the line between the two exists. It is important to experiment with your cloak. This will give you an idea of what is possible and effective.

Types of cloaks:

There are many different types of cloaks from swing capes to full circle cloaks. Different types do different tasks. A long cloak is an effective hanging blocker while it is not as effective as an aggressive attack cloak. Cloaks can be classified in three ways length, material, and weight. When you are choosing a cloak, you have to be cognizant of the limitations that weight, length, and material play in cloak use.

Length: as stated earlier, if you intend to do a lot of hanging techniques you want more length. Be aware: the longer the cloak, the slower it is in its transference of a move from the hand to the hem. The cloak moves in a series of lines and arcs. The longer the cloak, the longer the arc. On the up side, you can close off entire lines just by hanging the cloak off your arm.

A short cloak is quick, and is very effective as an active interceptor. Many of the sweeping and snapping techniques work very well with a short cloak. The disadvantage is the fact that you can go way off line very easily, if you are not paying attention. Once out of line, you have a severe disadvantage. An inch or a mile makes little difference if you just missed the block.

Weight can make or break a cloak fighter. A heavy cloak can catch an incoming thrust nicely, and slow it down considerably. But it will tire you out quickly. A light cloak is quick, and the momentum generated will stop a considerable amount; however it does not trap your opponent as quickly as a heavy cloak. (**Note:** a light cloak is nowhere near as warm as a heavy cloak.)

It is up to the individual fencer to determine what they will need in a cloak. Form follows function. Try a variety of cloaks and techniques to see what works best. The cloak should work with you, not against you.

Twirling and spins:

The traditional method of cloak use is to twirl the cloak in a figure eight pattern. The idea is to move the cloak fast enough to stop an incoming attack and having a return with the cloak to block a second attack. When this works it really works. In a big flourish your opponent is taken way off line. If it does not work you are dead at the hands of your opponent.

With this style of cloak there are three major moves: the figure eight, the circular spin, and the return. The figure eight is simply spinning the cloak in a figure eight motion in front of you, to either side, and over your head. The circular spin is spinning the cloak in a circle in the appropriate line. The return is a snap back to the neutral position or center.

In order for these moves to work, there are some key points to keep in mind. The most important is to break up your timing. You have to avoid a pattern or you will lose. All your opponent has to do is count to four twice, and if you are in a pattern they will see it right away. You have to move erratically with the cloak so that they can not count out the pattern. Be aware that you are going to blind yourself on numerous occasions. It may only be for a fraction of a second, but you will lose sight of your opponent. Nine times out of ten they will attack you at this point. If you have a good sense of balance and foot work it is often a good tactic in this situation to simply not be there for the inevitable attack.

The primary target on this style is the hand holding the cloak. It is the center of a cone. If you go straight down the center there is nothing to stop the attack except moving the hand. If you can control that hand, you have control of the cloak. The return has to be faster than the initial movement. You are often moving from the off line into the center. Your return from the sides has to move in quickly to catch the incoming attack in your center line.

The style of twirling the cloak in a big flourish is a high risk method, but it has its uses. This is an excellent way to make space. If you feel crowded do a few large twirls. A short burst of energy will often clear some room for you. Do not abuse this and continue the maneuver beyond a short burst. You are only setting your-self up.

Mental stance:

Fencing is not just a series of physical moves. It is a strategy game. Skill against skill; trick against trick. A fencer needs to be aware of what they are doing and what their opponent is doing. Everyone has a style or mental stance. One way to look at mental stance is the application of their techniques. Some fencers are aggressive while others are more reserved; some are even combinations of mental stances.

In some Asian Martial arts, the mental stances are broken down into terms of elements. One system uses five: earth, fire, water, wind and void.

- ***Fire*** is very aggressive. It explodes in a quick, all consuming burst. A fencer who “one shots” a lot could be considered to be working from a fire base.
- ***Earth*** is as solid as a mountain. It gives no ground and takes no ground. The opponent is ground down under an earth attack.
- ***Water*** surrounds an opponent and drowns them. The opponent has to deal with wave after wave of attacks. Their own offence has no opportunity to emerge.
- ***Wind*** comes in from all directions. You are never where your opponent needs you to be. Your opponents attack collapses under its own weight.
- ***Void*** is the hardest to describe. It is a flow between the stances: whatever is needed comes to the fore. Some call it fighting from the Zone. Of all the stances it is the hardest to really attain. The best way to put it is that you are not thinking, but relying on the training to take you through the bout.

As with physical stances these are not meant to be rigidly adhered to. A fighter should use the stances as necessary. Different situations require different tools.

Understanding the various mental stances will help a fencer read his opponent and respond

accordingly. If you see someone is fighting with the same mental stance over and over, use an attack to neutralize the mental stance. In other words, take away the ground that they are standing on.

Many people go into a cloak bout and use the cloak as an interference weapon. They twirl and snap it about, hoping that it will close a line or catch an in-coming attack. This method is ineffective. It pulls you into a pattern. After that, all your opponent has to do is time you and it's all over. In terms of cloak, the mental stance is a primary concern. You are often trying to cut off an attack as it starts, or even before. You do not have the luxury of a rigid block to save you. The cloak is an interception weapon. In order to intercept, you have to know what your opponent is doing. Observation of an opponent's mental stance can help in predicting their actions. Look at how they hold themselves. Are they calm or nervous? Your opponent quite often offers you all this information naturally, you just have to pay attention.

Stance:

A stance is the platform from which you fight. When fighting with cloak the basic principles apply. Be balanced and under control, do not hold a stance so long that you are stuck fighting from one position for the entire bout. A stance should be one in a series of positions that you take during a bout.

When you are developing a stance for cloak you have to be conscious of your blade position. If your blade position is wrong you will entangle yourself. You have to keep your blade out of the way while making it a threat to your opponent. You create this threat by keeping your blade in line with your opponent. If your attack can be brought into play quickly without telegraphing your intent it does not matter if you are in a high or low position. If your guard requires that you bring your blade completely off line, it is not very effective or efficient. Your stance should aid you in economy of motion.

It is important to be aware that your stance can often work against you. A good fencer will be able to read the possibilities of a stance. The human body can only move so many ways from any one position. This is one of the most common forms of telegraphing in any combat style. Your body position gives it all away. This is doubly true for cloak. It is often a momentum based weapon. A fencer has to explore all of the possibilities that a stance has to offer. Train with the idea of developing a flow from one position to the next. I am not referring to a linear progression a to b to c, that is a pattern. What I am referring to is more like a flow chart. I start at a, now I have ∞ number of choices that lead to y number of choices. If you were to visualize this flow it would look like a bush and not a ladder.

Stance can also be used to set up your opponent. This is called an invitation. Cloak gives you an advantage in this area. Fencers are used to weak cloak work and will often jump at the first opportunity. To create an invitation you purposely create an open line. When the opponent attacks this line you counter in an area that they have opened up in order to attack you. There are two points to make with invitations. First it is a planned action. You have to know where the opponent is going to be in terms of their attack and their body position. If your opponent reacts in a way you did not anticipate you have to be ready for it. Second make the invitation look like a natural mistake or flaw. Remember you are setting them up. If you look purposeful when you set the invitation you might as well shout "I am setting you up now" before you start. Make the invitation look like your guard slipped out of line. It can go a long way to look tired and a little sloppy. Make the illusion complete. Ideally your opponent should never know they were set up. Perpetuate the myth that you are lucky and leave them scratching their heads.

Fig. I. and II. are a front and side view of a refused or sinister guard. The weight is evenly distributed on both feet, the sword is back out of the way, and the cloak is in a neutral position. Both the cloak and the sword can be brought into play easily. The sword can also be realigned with simple manipulation of the hand and fingers



Fig 7-1 side view refused sinister guard.



Fig 7-2 front view refused sinister guard.

Grip:

Fig 8-1 the club grip.

There are three primary grips with the cloak. They are the club grip, sword grip, and the wrap. Each is geared to a certain style or task. The club grip is for strong violent actions. It involves a lot of swings and arm movement. This grip is good when you need to really move your opponent. The sword grip is useful when you need to manipulate the cloak. This grip gives you more subtle control over the cloak. The wrap is useful with catches and closing off lines depending on where you let the drape hang. (This grip works well for long cloaks.)



As with stance it is important to flow from one grip to the next depending on your needs. It does not take long to fall into a pattern. With practice it is possible to shift from one grip to the next smoothly in combat.

- fig. I. The club grip. Simply put gather up one end of the cloak and wrap you fingers around it. This grip lends itself to momentum based maneuvers.
- fig. II. The sword grip. In this grip you are holding the cloak like a sword. The first finger can act as a guide. This is a loose grip in order to allow for manipulation of the cloak. To do this grip properly you hook the lower three fingers under the edge of the cloak. The first finger points slightly out. The thumb applies pressure for stability. If you need something to hold on to it can help to roll the edge of the cloak.



Fig 8-2 the sword grip.

fig. III. and IV the “wrap grip”. The wrap uses the weight of the cloak to hold it onto your hand and or arm. First you grip the cloak with the thumb and first finger or a basic sword grip. (Fig. III.) You then flick your wrist in a counter clock wise direction to wrap the cloak around your hand. Make sure that the over hang is on the out side of your body. At this point you can let go of the cloak. The weight of the drape will hold it in place.

Fig 8-3 the initial wrap grip.



Fig 8-4 the fold over for the wrap grip.



Maneuver:

The basic maneuvers in cloak work are the lift, drop, horizontal sweep, vertical sweep, snap, and deflection. These moves are the basic foundation for all cloak work, regardless of the style. Variations come with the application of the techniques. The standard figure eight style is a series of sweeps. A hanging style is lifts, drops and deflections. An understanding of these basic maneuver is essential for any advanced technique. Take note that the moves are very similar to some of the techniques found in single rapier's off hand use. Any attack you make using an advantage that you create with the cloak should happen as the cloak maneuver fires. It is important to cut down the lag time. (Just do not entangle yourself on the way in.)

All of these maneuver on the surface are very simple. They can be used alone or in combinations as per the fencers need. Combinations are often a good plan. A good cloak combination can prevent a failed maneuver from being lethal. The second or third move takes up the defense since the first move missed.

Advanced cloak work depends mainly on the application. Often a step here or a push there makes all the difference. For example a drop or lift becomes devastating when the cloak is draped over the blade. It is next to impossible to quickly pull a blade from underneath a cloak.

One of the more advanced concepts that can be worked on is economy of motion. A series of small spirals made with the hand is very effective. The basic principle is that what ever you do with the hand that controls the cloak is reflected and enlarged in the hem of the cloak. Moving the hand in small subtle motions causes a larger movement through the cloak. The line of defense is controlled by moving the hand to the line it is needed in. As with all cloak work it is important to pay attention to the danger of patterning.

- *fig. I. Lift : raise the cloak into the incoming attack so that the attack is pushed off line in an upward direction. Once you catch your opponent maintain pressure to prevent the blade from engaging.*



Fig 9-1 the lift.

- *fig. II. Drop: lower the cloak into an attack to force it down. Do not spin or try to sweep with the cloak. Just drop the hand straight down. The strength of this maneuver is its speed. A straight drop is very quick. Gravity is your friend.*



Fig 9-2 the drop.

The sweeps are accomplished by moving the hand through the line you wish to defend in the direction you want to defend. There is a bit of a circular motion as you move the cloak. The other method is to flick the wrist in the direction you want to go in. So if you move the cloak along the x axis it is a horizontal sweep, along the y is a vertical sweep. The cloak's natural tendency is to open up along the axis that it is moved in. The degree to which it opens depends on the amount of force that you put into the move.

fig. III. Horizontal sweep: this is a sweep in the horizontal plain.



Fig 9-3 the horizontal sweep.

fig. IV. Vertical sweep: a sweep through the vertical plain.



Fig 9-4 the vertical sweep.

fig. V. and VI. The snap: the snap is a jamming maneuver. As your opponent starts their attack you snap the cloak into the attack. This violently forces the blade off line. It is akin to snapping a towel. At the apex of the snap the cloak has a moment of rigidity that can stop an incoming attack. You have to understand your range with this maneuver. **You can not strike your opponent with the cloak.** **If you snap the cloak and they walk into it is up to you to control the cloak.**



Fig 9-5 the delivery of the snap.



Fig 9-6 the snap.

fig. VII. The deflection: an incoming attack is pushed to one side at an angle so that there is nothing for the tip to catch on.



Fig 9-7 the deflection.

Drill work:

As with all fencing forms drill work in cloak is very important. The drill trains a maneuver into the muscle memory and gives the fencer a familiarity with the capabilities of the cloak. There are two basic styles of drills: the set drill, and some thing called ippon sparring. The set drill is simple: two fencers face off, one fencer throws a direct shot, the other uses a set maneuver to counter, such as the thrust lift or thrust snap. The ippon sparring is a more random activity. Again you have two fencers face off. One is a defender, the other is the aggressor. The aggressor attacks at quarter to half speed. The defender gets a defensive maneuver that ends in a kill. This should be worked in sets of three before switching roles. Each maneuver should be different and done until it is right before switching roles. This drill is meant to explore the possibilities of the weapons form. It should be done in a slow, deliberate fashion to maintain effectiveness.

The point of drilling is not to see how fast you can do the drill. It is to develop control of your weapon and skills. Any drill work you do should be slow and deliberate. To quote a successful fencer "Do each drill like it is the only one you are going to do that day." In other words do each move perfectly. The more you drill, the better you will get. Time invested yields a return.

When you do your drill work do not forget to work the entire fencing mechanism. Do not concentrate on one area neglecting all of the other factors involved in fencing. What you do in one area affects the rest of your fencing. It is an interlocking chain. Footwork, blade work, off hand control, body control and observational skills all combine together to form your fencing skills. A weakness in one area is a devastating drain on your fencing.

Afterward:

One of the maxims that I try to live by is "no technique is sacred". This is a constant struggle. I seem to continually rely on my favorite form or technique. This is a work in progress, that will probably be done when I am dead. Please use the blank space to make notes. In fact write all over this book. It is not a bible or a law book but a teaching aid. In order for this manual to be effective you have to expand beyond it's boundaries.

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