

# EN GARDE!

## MELEE COMBAT STANCES

**W** **WHETHER YOU ARE PLAYING IN THE** far future or in a medieval fantasy setting, melee combat is almost certain to play a role. This article expands the options for hand-to-hand combat, allowing characters to adopt certain "stances" or fighting styles. A combatant may choose to fight defensively, or go for all-out attack; she might choose a fluid fighting style as she moves amongst her foes, or a strong, unmoving stance. Each stance offers the combatant certain bonuses and penalties. Many melee specialists will learn more than one stance, and switch between them according to circumstances.

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Additionally, different stances are used to counteract the stances adopted by the opponent. A swordsman who knows many stances may find himself at a tactical advantage.

A stance is an exploit. Those listed in this article are universal exploits suitable for any era of play, whether your character is using a battleaxe or a laser sword. Entering a new stance is a free action. The core rules already contain one example of a stance - Reckless Act. In this article, Reckless Act is known as the Fool's Stance.



## CRANE STANCE

The crane stance is a patient one, focusing on the counter-attack. When in crane stance, the attacker may make one melee attack as a free reaction when missed by a melee attacker.

## FOOL'S STANCE

Described in the core rules as Reckless Act, this dangerous stance allows the attacker to utterly disregard his own safety as he unleashes his attacks. Enemies gain a +2d6 bonus to attack him until his next turn, but he gains +1d6 bonus to his attack rolls. Note that this stance can also be used with ranged weapons.

## GUARD STANCE

A defensive stance, the guard stance allows the combatant to increase his MELEE DEFENSE score by reducing his attack pool. For every 1d6 removed from the attack pool, MELEE DEFENSE is increased by +3 until the start of the combatant's next turn (at which point he must again choose how many dice to remove).

The guard stance can only be entered as the first action in a turn.

## IRON STANCE

The iron stance is a solid, resolute pose. Those in the iron stance gain +2 SOAK, and are immune to knockback and knockdown attempts from foes of their size or smaller unless the attacker succeeds in scoring a critical hit. The character may not move while in the iron stance.

## PANTHER STANCE

The panther stance is fluid, always in motion. Whenever the combatant scores a hit with a melee attack, she may move 5'.

## SNAKE STANCE

The snake stance is a deceptive, weaving style designed to distract, confuse, and mesmerize. When in snake stance, a combatant gains an extra +1d6 when Feinting.

## WOLF STANCE

The wolf stance focuses on wearing down the opponent through dozens of tiny injuries. Often adopted by groups of fighters, this stance can be very useful when taking down a larger, tougher foe. When in wolf stance, you may automatically do 1 point of damage to an adjacent foe at the start of your turn, plus 1 point for each ally adjacent to your target.

## STANCES IN HISTORY

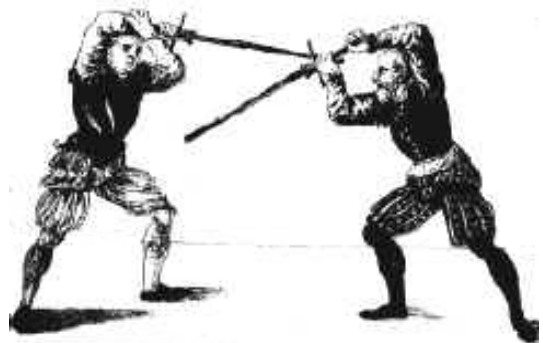
Medieval swordfighting took advantage of stances. While many will be familiar with Eastern martial arts style stance names, the practice of guards and postures in Europe was just as common. Many medieval swordmasters taught five distinct stances: the Ox, Plow, Fool, Roof, and Tail stances (although the names varied in different languages - for example, the Italians called the Ox the "*Finestra*", or "window").

In game terms, these five positions make up the Classical Stance.

## CLASSICAL STANCE

The classical stance is commonly taught in "European" style settings. An all-around stance, moving easily between the five main postures and a number of secondary ones, it grants a great deal of flexibility. At the start of their turn, a combatant in the classical stance may select from one of the following benefits; this benefit lasts until the start of her next turn.

- +2 MELEE DEFENSE
- +2 damage on all melee attacks



STANCE	Crane	Fool's	Guard	Iron	Panther	Snake	Wolf
Crane		Crane			Crane	Snake	Wolf
Fool's	Crane		Guard			Fool's	Fool's
Guard		Guard			Panther	Snake	Guard
Iron					Iron	Iron	Wolf
Panther	Crane		Panther	Iron		Panther	
Snake	Snake	Fool's	Snake	Iron	Panther		
Wolf	Wolf	Fool's	Guard	Wolf			

## STANCE VERSUS STANCE

While each stance has its own benefits, true swordsmanship takes place when fighters change their stance to counteract the tactics employed by their opponents. Many stances are able to negate the benefits of opposing stances.

Compare the two stances adopted by the combatants and refer to the table, above. This tells you the "winning" stance in that particular contest. The losing stance does not provide any benefit to the combatant. Often two melee opponents will shift stances constantly in an attempt to negate their opponent's advantage, and the swordsman who knows more stances may often gain the upper hand.

If both combatants have adopted the same stance, neither gains any benefit.

This comparison only takes place between two combatants engaged in melee combat. If more than two people are involved in the melee, the countering effect applies to only one designated target.

*"The primary thing when you take a sword in your hands is your intention to cut the enemy, whatever the means. Whenever you parry, hit, spring, strike or touch the enemy's cutting sword, you must cut the enemy in the same movement. It is essential to attain this. If you think only of hitting, springing, striking or touching the enemy, you will not be able actually to cut him."*

-Miyamoto Musashi, The Book of Five Rings

