

*The Story of*

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# THE BOOK of FIVE RINGS

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Miyamoto Musashi, Master Swordsman and Tactician,  
Who Lived in Kumamoto.

**NEO ONE  
KUMAMOTO**



# MIYAMOTO MUSASHI

Miyamoto Musashi was born in the country of Harima (Hyogo Prefecture) in 1584. He won his first duel at the age of 13, over a master swordsman of the Shinto Style, Arima Kihei. From that time until the age of 28 or 29, he had fought over 60 duels, such as those with members of the famous Yoshioka clan and battle with Sasaki Kojiro at Ganryujima, never losing a single fight. He further continued to pursue the spirit of swordsmanship and the secrets of the art of war, until at last he founded the style of “Niten Ichi Ryu (二天一流)”. He came to Kumamoto around 1640, when he was 57 years old, where the lord Hosokawa Tadatoshi was happy to welcome him as a guest of honor. Musashi stayed here in Kumamoto for five years until he died early in the summer of 1645. During his stay here, he spent most of his time in the study of the tea ceremony, Zen, and calligraphy. He was also a great ink painter. In the last years before his death, Musashi retired to Reigan-do cave, located in the foothills of Mt. Kinpozan, where he wrote “The Book of Five Rings (五輪書)”, detailing the truths he uncovered throughout his life in order to guide future generations.



Miyamoto Musashi has the distinction of being the strongest swordsman in Japanese history. While he is a man who overcame a great number of duels throughout his life and remained unbeaten up to his death, this was not simply because he followed the way of warfare from a young age. He would grasp the status of the battle and the psychology of his opponent, using only the techniques and strategies that held the best possible chance for victory and nothing else, for “victory over the opponent” was everything. Even after this he continued to practice every morning and night, pursuing not only why he had continually won, but the deeper reasons behind that still, and it was not until around his 50th birthday that he finally found those truths. Reflecting on his own life full of battles, in his last years he wrote “The Book of Five Rings” as a compilation for future generations to inherit, describing the way of life for samurai and the profound truths behind the art of war.

The book, spanning five volumes, naturally does not teach mere swordsmanship. The Way with which Musashi lived and promoted was not limited to martial arts, but extended to all Ways. “All things with no teacher.” he stated. Not borrowing the words from any teachings or disciplines of the past, he divided the truths of the style of “Niten Ichi Ryu”, which he founded, into five volumes, describing them in a strict and logical manner. This practical methodology for continuously polishing the spirit and perception, overcoming the opponent in all aspects, and opening up one’s own way was a universal value upon which people lived.



### THE *Earth* CHAPTER (地の巻)

“Earth” represents the ground and foundations. It describes the foundation necessary to follow the correct way, explaining what the art of war is and in what way samurai should exist. It also focuses on the way of life of samurai in society, the rationality of using two swords in battle, and the significance of finding victory by making full use of all weapons. Always be logical, always be practical. The Earth Chapter encompasses the overall picture of the Niten Ichi Ryu style that Musashi built.

### THE *Water* CHAPTER (水の巻)

“Water” can be a single drop or a mighty ocean. The Water Chapter teaches the importance of practical training so that one can always fight their opponent with the flexibility of water. A physical posture and a spirit ready for battle. After mastering the five fundamental attitudes, one can fight taking any and all shapes, without being bound to a stance. By mastering the tactics taught in this chapter, whether confronting an enemy one-on-one or in a battle of 10,000 a side, victory can always be achieved.

### THE *Fire* CHAPTER (火の巻)

Even a small “fire” can become a large conflagration if left to burn. A practical methodology assuming battle where even a single man can overcome great numbers. Assess the situation, put your enemy at a disadvantage, create advantages for yourself, and adopt a spirit and attitude to seize the initiative. Always read the opponent’s mentality, use that knowledge to strike first. The Fire Chapter is not full of mere spoken theory, but instead says to leave no stone unturned in order to win.

### THE *Wind* CHAPTER (風の巻)

“Wind” refers to style. Without knowing the Way of other styles, you cannot know the true Way of Niten Ichi Ryu. Other styles have various rules concerning stances and use of swords, but by being caught up in such things it is not possible to win a fight with your life on the line. Cast aside adherence to rules and find the truth. Knowing other styles and finding the validity of your own style is the heart of The Wind Chapter.





## THE *Void* CHAPTER (空の巻)

“Void” is the absence of things, and represents that which cannot yet be recognized. In all things, by knowing the things that exist, it is possible to know that which does not exist. The void is a place of virtue, not one of evil. It is the frontier of ultimate freedom.

In this final chapter, Musashi describes his will in a short and precise manner. He says that by resolving oneself and following his path of the warrior, it is possible to reach this frontier of the void. It is freedom of the spirit and mind, without being controlled by anyone else, and without any confusion.

“Examine, ponder, train.”

Throughout the volumes, Musashi continually repeats these commands.

Through continued examination, continual pondering and continual training, naturally the Way unfolds.





## Reigan-do Cave (霊巖洞)

Found at the foot of Mt. Kinpozan, located in what is currently western Kumamoto City. Sheer cliffs appear in the dense, lush greenery, and among those a cave opens with a gaping mouth. When Musashi realized that his time on this earth was coming to a close, he became a hermit, moving to this cave and spending two years writing *The Book of Five Rings*. Looking back on his own life, he chose this land to record the truths of the art of war he had attained, so that they could be left to future generations.

The man sat in tranquility throughout the four seasons, deep in Zen meditation on a large rock within the cave. What scenery did he experience, and what feelings could he have had throughout that time?





## Shimada Museum of Arts (島田美術館)

Precious historical materials and antiquities of the warrior culture left in Kumamoto are stored here. Seeing actual swords and bokken used by the legendary swordsman Miyamoto Musashi is sure to surprise. Among the various skills and hobbies Musashi acquired a taste for in his last years in Kumamoto, the ink paintings he created, beautiful representations of his keen sensibility and spirit, remain as standout work in the history of Japanese ink painting. Including various color woodblock prints and portraits created after his death, this is a location absolutely worth visiting to learn about Miyamoto Musashi.

## Musashi-zuka Park (武蔵塚公園)

The park where the grave of Miyamoto Musashi lies. The legend that his body was interred in a suit of armor and that he was buried standing is also told. Musashi, who spent his last years welcomed in Kumamoto as a guest of Hosokawa Tadatoshi, left a will saying that he wished to protect the lord, even in death. As such, the grave was built on the roads leading into town, in what is now Musashi-zuka Park. Holding two swords, the statue of Musashi stands majestically, welcoming those who visit. The park also includes Japanese gardens, tea houses, and more.



## Kumamoto Castle (熊本城)

Kumamoto Castle was built over the course of seven years, starting in 1601, by the Sengoku warlord Kato Kiyomasa. With a history of over 400 years, it is considered one of Japan's three premier castles. It features signature stone walls known as "Musha-gaeshi (武者返し)", which towered high above all else to repel the enemy. The exceptionally large castle, standing tall in its vast space, has been respected for many years as the symbol of Kumamoto. Musashi, welcomed as a guest of the Higo Kumamoto clan, at the same time taught the feudal lord Hosokawa Tadatoshi the way of warfare, which he discovered through his own life of battle. This is a location where the spirit of Musashi still resides.

## Sakura-no-baba Jousaien (桜の馬場 城彩苑)

Close to Kumamoto Castle lies Sakura-no-baba Jousaien, a collection of shops where you can experience the rich culture and flavors of Kumamoto. Historic cityscapes have been reproduced, and you can enjoy historical and cultural experiences in the park's "Wakuwakuza (湧々座)".



The last years of Miyamoto Musashi, lived in Kumamoto



## Suizenji Jojuen Park (水前寺成趣園)

A vast beautiful Japanese garden, built during the lifetime of Lord Hosokawa Tadatoshi, founder of the Higo Kumamoto clan and the one who invited Musashi to Kumamoto. The park supports a rich ecosystem, arranged around a pond that is likened to that more of a lake and has continually flowing spring water. Surrounded by gentle man-made hills and lush greenery, you can enjoy the beauty of this garden, a collection of some of the best aspects of Japanese culture. At the "Kokindenjunoma (古今伝授の間)", in a position where the garden view is most beautiful, you can enjoy green tea and sweets while gazing out over the scenery.



The last years of Miyamoto Musashi, lived in Kumamoto





### Reigan-do Cave

Address: 589 Matsuomachi Hirayama, Nishi-ku, Kumamoto City (Unganzenji Temple)  
 Tel: +81-96-329-8854 (Unganzenji Temple)  
 Operating hours: 8:00 - 17:00  
 Fee: Adults 300 yen, children 100 yen



### Shimada Museum of Arts

Address: 4-5-28 Shimasaki, Nishi-ku, Kumamoto City  
 Tel: +81-96-352-4597  
 Operating hours: 10:00 - 17:00 (can enter until 16:30)  
 Closed: Tuesdays, the New Year's holiday (Dec. 29-Jan. 3), and the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month (excluding holidays)  
 ※The museum may also close based on the facility's schedule or to change exhibitions.  
 Fee: Adults 700 yen, university/high school students 400 yen, middle/elementary school students 200 yen



### Musashi-zuka Park

Address: 1-1232 Tatsudamachi Yuge, Kita-ku, Kumamoto City  
 Operating hours: Normally open



### Kumamoto Castle

Address: 1-1 Honmaru, Chuo-ku, Kumamoto City  
 Tel: +81-96-352-5900



### Sakura-no-baba Jousaien

Address: 1-1-1 Ni no Maru, Chuo-ku, Kumamoto City  
 Tel: +81-96-288-5600  
 Operating hours: 9:00 - 17:30 (Restaurant open until 18:00)  
 Closed: 12/30 - 12/31



### Suizenji Jojuen Park

Address: 8-1 Suizenji Koen, Chuo-ku, Kumamoto City  
 Tel: +81-96-383-0074  
 Operating hours: 8:30 - 17:00 (can enter until 16:30)  
 Fee: Adults (high school and up) 400 yen, children (middle/elementary school) 200 yen

The spirit Miyamoto Musashi left behind in *The Book of Five Rings* has transcended its time and continues with us even now. Various translations and interpretations have been made not just in Japan, but all throughout the world. What lies within its pages is universal, transcending eras, borders, and cultures. Whether it is in business, sports, art, or academics, it serves as a guide in everyone's life. Especially in this era of complexity that we all live in, we all should aspire to touch upon the Way presented in *The Book of Five Rings*.

Immediately before his death, Musashi looked back upon the path he walked, stating "Do not regret what you have done." This man, who was renowned as a great swordsman and tactician, lived a tumultuous life, and in his last moments reached a frontier of freedom. We would like you to follow in his footsteps and see how he spent the last years of his life in Kumamoto.

**[Image Sources]**

□ Inside cover : Portrait of Miyamoto Musashi  
□ P2-3 : Left center / Portrait of 13 years old Miyamoto Musashi (partially used) Upper & background / Copy of Gorinnosho "The Book of the Wind" (partially used)  
□ P10 : Left center / Swordguard with Sea cucumber Design Attributed to Miyamoto Musashi  
Lower left / Battle of Ganryu-Jima By Gountei Sadahide (partially used) Right / A Kingfisher Perched on Withered Branch By Miyamoto Musashi  
※All artwork and documents are owned by Shimada Museum of Arts.

**[Credits]**

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