

Observations on Guardsmen

The Hatchet

My Lord, this morning I followed Ruena and the Childe to the practice yard where I witnessed the Guard working almost exclusively with hatchets. The Childe was not accompanied by anyone other than Ruena. I'm uncertain if this means he is deemed safe within these walls despite the current unrest, or if the Consort's sister is considered a capable bodyguard.

The hatchet is of the style commonly found throughout the High Hills, a wilderness tool that doubles quite effectively as a weapon. I was surprised to see the guardsmen drilling with such a primitive weapon until I saw them in action. During the drill I began to recall all the places in my travels that I have seen various sorts of hatchets in use. I suspect it is just this widespread use that causes the guardsmen to train with the weapon.





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The hatchet is gripped near the bottom of the handle but with the last inch or so of the butt exposed. This bottom inch can be used to strike down an opponent in close quarters much as the pommel of a sword is used to do so. When the guardsman closes with his opponent, he slides his hand up the handle until it almost seems to be snugged beneath the head. This allows for harsh, deadly blows like those used in a bare-fist contest.

The hatchet is typically paired with a knife in the off-hand during these training sessions. The knife is sometimes held blade down but is more often used blade up, edge out. The knife is seldom used to strike an opponent except when a fighter successfully hooks his opponent's weapon clear from the body with the hatchet. I retract my previous claim. I have just seen the knife repeatedly used as the primary defense against attempts to grapple. The knife is a much quicker weapon than a hatchet and so is used against fast, sudden attacks that cannot be easily avoided.

The principle technique of defense with the weapon seems to involve not being there when a blow arrives. Once engaged their feet are never still. As with knife fighting, the guardsmen continuously move as they train with the hatchet, staying up on their toes, sidestepping attacks, circling and seeking to flank their opponent. Rarely do they use the hatchet to block attacks, but when it is used so, the motion is more of a deflection than a clear block.

Basic stance greatly resembles that of a bare-fist fighter. Which combination of shoulder and hand forward seems dictated by the opponent's weapon. Against swords, maces or long axes, the hatchet-wielding shoulder and foot are typically forward. Against knives, short swords or other hatchets, the hatchet-wielding shoulder and foot are back.

Weapon forward seems the more powerful defensive stance allowing for a surprising number of effective blocks and parries against attacks. However, do not be fooled; this stance also provides a longer reach and a multitude of attacks with the hatchet including: thrusts, punches, short, quick hacking blows using only the arm, looping blows, hooking the opponent's weapon, etc.

Weapon back would appear to be the aggressive stance. When an attack is made from this stance it is frequently a full-body effort; the legs, hips, shoulders and arm striking for a killing blow.

Throwing – hatchet blade in a vertical line with the body, off-foot forward, weapon hand





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brings hatchet up and back over shoulder, maintaining vertical line, then smoothly forward, stepping into the throw, releasing the hatchet before the arm is fully extended forward. The guardsman never looks at hatchet, instead keeping his eyes on the target. The guardsmen do little to telegraph a throw until it is underway. One warning that such an attack is about to be made is a result of the guardsman judging the distance. This often results in a small step toward or away from the target as the guardsmen judges the revolutions the axe will take on its way to the target.

One young guardsman stood out during the exercises and was particularly effective with the hatchet in melees involving multiple opponents. Much to the disgust of some of the older guardsmen, this Kytun would, without hesitation, throw the hatchet he had in hand as soon as any other weapon became available. With the fall of his initial opponent, he would throw his hatchet at another opponent, pick up the weapon of his fallen foe and advance. He repeated this technique in multiple drills and exercises. It caused several intense discussions amongst the guardsmen but clearly delighted the Childe and Ruena.

The hatchet is a particularly aggressive weapon, not well suited to any noble soldiery. It lacks subtlety, is not impressive, inspires little confidence and is easily overlooked as a simple tool. However, in the hands of the guardsmen, it is a brutally effective tool. If the rangers and militia of the High Hills are skilled with this weapon they must be considered a threat in any military conflict.

excerpt from the notebook of Shar Aronos, discovered in wreckage off the shores of Wardhill



Illustration [Guardsmen Sketches: Hatchet](#) by Andy Underwood.

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