

## Observations on Guardsmen

### The War Sword

My Lord, this morning I find myself sitting uncomfortably near Shiann Vanth. Much to my relief, the old hag, with her too young face and too old eyes, seems to ignore me. I know my mind is shielded against her intrusions, but I find any proximity to her extremely disturbing. All Court whispers of the undue influence she exerts over the Emperor Gallidon, Na'naat bless his name, but no one can say from where it springs.

The captain of Lady Vanth's personal guard, one Skarman, actually seems to be conducting some part of the session, the Imperial Guardsmen acting as his students. The chosen weapon this morn is the war sword in all three of its common varieties: double-edged long sword, single-edged long sword, and double-edged great sword. Watching this confirms the suspicions I've reported elsewhere: House Vanth is conducting military operations in some part of the Empire.





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The guardsmen are listening to this trumped-up mercenary because he has actually made practical use of a war sword somewhere in the very recent past. He is demonstrating the effectiveness of the great sword as a tool to breach even the heaviest doors. Instead of using axes to chop through a door, his men used war swords to destroy the door while simultaneously threatening the defenders behind it. I am forced to admit, it is an impressive display. The guardsmen are practicing this new technique on several heavy doors they have brought in like children with a new toy.

War sword technique as practiced by the Imperial Guard would appear to consist of four principle guard stances and five key strikes. All these guards and strikes are executed with two hands. The four stances are: hound stance wherein the blade is held outward at waist height, ox stance wherein the blade is held outward at shoulder height, snake stance wherein the blade is held out and downward from the waist with the point aimed at the ground, and falcon stance wherein the blade is held above and behind the head. Oddly, Skarmann refers to these guard stances as earth, air, water, and fire respectively. The guardsmen accept these terms without comment.

Falcon is obviously the most aggressive, but all four stances are both a defensive guard and a starting point for a vicious attack. Each stance, depending on the attack made against the swordsman, offers one of the devastating master strikes as a counter attack. The guardsmen refer to these master strikes as: wrath, crooked strike, squinting, the break and parting. I am unable to observe where, in fact, these various strikes begin and end. All seem to involve some measure of overrunning the opponent or moving back into one of the four guard stances. Cuts and thrusts are both used. There are also strikes involving the guard and pommel of the sword when the combatants have closed in.

Overall, use of the war sword should not be mistaken for dueling or simple sword fighting. It consists of powerful strikes intended to kill and a series of fluid defensive movements that always seem to set up another brutal attack. Each of the guardsmen constantly change up the angle of attack, the side from which the strike begins and the traveling after. The war sword is not an instrument of sport, nor decoration. It is a weapon.

I am puzzled by this display. Is the Imperial Guard preparing for open warfare by practicing with these heavy weapons? Or is it simply another sign of their fanatical devotion to being trained with all things martial?





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



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

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