

## Chapter Nine: Sword Training - Part Two

"It's completely different, and exactly the same," Sam said. "It's a tricky thing to explain, but you'll understand better with more training." Sam raised his sword. "Now, if I come at you from above, and you block it."

James raised his sword horizontally as Sam brought his sword down vertically.

"That's good," Sam said. "But, look, your body is open now."

Holding the pose with his sword at eye level, James could see that Sam was right.

"Rather than just blocking the blow, you can push the opponent's sword away, while bringing yours back to cover your body."

"The Sel'vyanni Oktai," Evan said to them. "The push and pull. Defence with offense. The Voarn have a similar technique."

"Exactly," Sam said. "Offense with defence. You can turn a block into an attack. That way you are attacking with almost every strike."

"Sounds good in theory," James said, steadying his breath as he returned to his stance.

Sam called out adjustments as they went, until he was happy with James's actions.

"Blocking with my toughlets has proved useful up to now," James said between sequences.

"Against blunt weapons, aye," Sam said, relaxing his pose. "Even the grillock's claws could barely penetrate the metal. But a sword is far more powerful and capable than you might think. A trained strike could cut through a Rimas toughlet and sever your arm too. An average blade is made from a reinforced tetra-steel, an advanced alloy, and in the hands of a master can penetrate most standard armour. Your Tridonite is perhaps not the best example of a master sword, but it'll serve its purpose to train you for now."

"And yours, Sam?" James asked. "Where did you get your sword from?"

Sam shifted his blade in the sunlight, admiring it. "Ellie was a gift from Aan Amos, a talented sword maker in Tyken Town. He's now retired, but he found it in himself to make this one, just for me." The light caught a cluster of blisters on the metal, causing Sam to frown. "That serpent's venom was quite something, though," he muttered.

James had expected Sam to tell him his sword had been a family heirloom, or that it was a special Oneron blade of some kind. A legendary sword worthy of a war hero. But to hear it was made by a local in Tyken Town, and likely not too long ago, surprised him.

"And if someone shoots at us?" James asked. "What good would a sword be then?"

"Then you throw sorcery at them," Evan said from the side. "Destroy their weapons. Sway the battle in your favour."

Sam nodded. "Right, there's always that." He gestured with his sword as he spoke. "Swords have been a staple of armies and wars for centuries. Even with laser fire all around you, a trained soldier can be deadlier than most armaments. A sword can withstand most gun blasts, and some can even deflect projectiles back. And that's without using personal energy shields, or a physical shield in hand. Some of the more expensive swords come with a light shield barrier."

"Right," James said. "I've read about a few battles, like the Zell Wars. They said that magic and swords were the most widely used weapons in those wars, more so than armaments."

Sam nodded. "We've come a long way since the Break. Back when artillery could destroy entire planets."

Sam flourished his sword and resumed his battle stance. "Back to it." He went on to show James how to block attacks from the side, and how to twist the blades away for him to set up a counter strike. He noted how these actions worked for swords, knives, staffs and batons, the four most common melee weapons.

They struck back and forth, and James soon found a rhythm and confidence in his actions. This time, he felt that his breathing was more under control, despite his heart still pounding in his chest. When he blocked four successive attacks, each time pushing Sam's sword away and keeping his stance, Sam stepped back and paused.

"And that is the Dosaani Defense," Sam told him, his shoulders relaxing. "It uses the basic Fiogro, and is the foundation of Bedochae, the true test of an Oneron."

*James wiped the sweat from his brow and rubbed his hand on his long-shorts.* So much to learn. There's so much out there... did I really do all of this before?

"That's enough for now," Sam said.

James noticed that Sam's brow was also covered in sweat, and his eyes were strained with tension. He got the feeling that Sam was holding back the extent of his injuries. Likely he was pushing himself in order to fully train James.

"Not bad," Sam said, "for your first sword session. Well, not really your first session, from a certain perspective. How did it feel?"

James nodded. "Fine. Good. Well, not as bad as I thought it would be. Once we got going, it wasn't so bad."

Sam held his gaze for a moment, before smiling. "Good work, James. You'll be back to your old self in no time." He turned to Evan. "How about it, young master? Feel like sparring? Show James how it's done?"

"Are you sure your injuries will allow it?" Evan asked.

Sam shrugged and gestured with his sword. "I'll do my best to keep up with you."

"Are you sure, Sam?" James asked. "You guys don't have to show me anymore. We can save it for another time."

"You started this," Sam said lightly. "Now I'm in the..." he swung his sword, "swing of things."

Evan nodded. His expression was neutral, almost solemn, as he drew his sword.

James marvelled at the size of the broadsword, appreciating the skill and strength it must take to wield such a thing, now knowing how it felt to swing a sword. He moved back to give them space, knowing that they were both experienced fighters.

Evan stretched his neck and rotated his shoulders, all while holding his sword in one hand.

"I'm guessing that thing is quite heavy," Sam said. "But you wield it so easily."

Evan casually twirled the sword around his hand, nodding. "It is a practiced art. And requires some channelling of wind sorcery."

"To help you lift it?" Sam asked, his voice rising with awe. "I'm impressed. Channelling magic while sword fighting takes a lot of control and power. You must be well learned in both arts."

Evan assumed his position opposite Sam, around ten feet from him, and raised his sword. "It is a practiced art," he repeated.

James watched Evan with a new-found respect. Evan had mentioned previous training, and the Voarn were known to be strong magic users. *Evan seems so young. He's just a boy, but can do so much... And I can just about swing a sword without killing myself.*

Evan raised his brows. "Ready?"

Sam nodded.

Shuffling forward, Evan swung his great sword. Sam ducked and side stepped, catching Evan's next blow with his sword and pushing them both away.

Bouncing on his feet, Evan lunged and struck out, with Sam turning to let the sword pass by him. Sam spun away from Evan's follow-up swing and widened the distance between them.

Sam assessed Evan, before he darted forward and released a great swing that connected to Evan's sword, producing a ringing clang that echoed around them. Evan's planted feet

shifted back from the impact, but he recovered quickly. A succession of blows and blocks followed before they pushed away from each other.

James marvelled at their skill, realising how little he had accomplished by swinging his sword a few times in a controlled sequence. Sam moved so well, he noted. Almost as if his shoulder didn't bother him any more.

Ducking under Sam's swing, Evan lowered himself close to the ground, before jumping and spinning, and bringing his sword down onto Sam's blade. The clash released another deafening clang, this time throwing out a spark also. Resuming their stances, they both stepped to each other with their swords raised.

They froze in mid strike. Then turned towards James.

It took James a moment to realise they were looking beyond him, just as he heard boot steps approaching.

He turned to see the merchant from the tavern. Audlin Yalsune, he had called himself. He walked towards them, accompanied by three tall muqgraas, the reptilian race that were similar to the bahkschim's.

A grin spread across Audlin's tanned face. The sun gleamed off the large jewels adorning the ornate golden sceptre he carried.

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1. How did the training go for you? Sound legitimate enough? Too detailed/boring? Just right?
2. What do you think of James's character so far? How is he coming across for you?
3. Anything else stand out for you? Good or bad?