

7th Sea
Game Year:
1669

Swordsman's Guild™

“En garde!”

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Swordsman's Guild

"The razor's edge — that is where one faces the true test of honor."

— Renato Marchello

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Dedication

Steve: To Kathy, Eric, and Beth, for being there and understanding when I wasn't able to be there.

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The Eternal Dance

Carleon – 1623

“Your king is an abomination upon the throne. He spits upon the Vaticine Church, and now he thinks he is more powerful than the Hierophant!”

Oswin looked at the Castillian foolish enough to mouth such an insult in an Avalon tavern. A richly dressed strutting peacock, like all his people. Apparently strong drink and the company of his fellows gave him the courage to speak his mind. Neither would give him safety.

Oswin shoved his way through the crowd, noting that several other Avalon fighters were preparing to engage the popinjay. No matter. He would be the first. As his father taught him, the best way to gain a reputation was to pick a fight. The foolish Castillian made it easy for him.

Before anyone else could move to engage the loudmouth, Oswin had already drawn his glove, and slapped the man across his face. “An insult to one’s King is intolerable, sirrah. Will you defend

yourself outside, or do you lack honor as lacking along with manners?”

This close, Oswin could discern that the Castillian was no older than he was. His fellows were of the same age, which was a shame. Older and wiser heads might have saved the lad from the death he had earned at Oswin’s hands.

The Castillian sneered at his challenger. “If it is a duel that you wish, *señor*,” he snarled in passable Avalon, “Then a duel you shall have.” Ignoring his comrades’ looks of concern, the boy strode out through the front door of the tavern and out into the street. His friends followed him. Oswin was somewhat taken aback: clearly his opponent was more sober than he had first appeared. No matter: challenge had been offered and accepted.

He knew some of the patrons here. He nodded to two of them, who accepted his invitation. They stepped out onto the muddy street, the rest of the patrons not far behind.

The Castillian had already drawn his sword and was slashing it through the air in a series of practice cuts. He fought in the antiquated Aldana style that Oswin had seen the Castillian sailors use. It was the very antithesis of the solid, traditional Donovan style that Oswin and so many of his countrymen employed.

As the tavern crowd began to filter out onto the street, Oswin removed his buckler from its hook and drew his smallsword. He nodded to his impromptu seconds, who stepped forward. The Castillian gave them a look of contempt, handed over his sword, then nodded to two of his own friends. They stepped over to Oswin and



took his sword and buckler. The weapons were quickly examined to make sure they had no poison or other secret tricks. They returned the weapons to their owners, then stepped aside.

Taking up a position a few feet back and opposite the Castillian, Oswin called out, "May I know the name of the man who I will be killing this day?"

The Castillian paused in mid-cut. "I am Arturo Acedo de Ramirez del Castillo. And whose blood shall I have the honor of decorating these crude unpaved streets with?"

Buckler in left hand, smallsword in right, Oswin assumed the first defensive position. "I am Oswin Stiles. And know this: I speak for all those present when I tell you that no man of Avalon would tolerate your insults to King Richard. I merely have the honor of being the quickest to discipline you."

Arturo dropped into his own position, his profile turned to the side. At least he was right-handed. Good, Oswin thought. He had faced swordsmen trained by the Vodacce, and had no desire to deal with an off-handed opponent.

"Have at you then!" he cried, and stepped forward.

The first few seconds flashed by in a blink. Oswin tried for a quick bind, hoping to avoid the cutting steel of Arturo's blade. If he could force the weapon out of the way and leave his opponent exposed, then he could end the engagement with ease. The Castillian was too fast, though, and dodged his efforts like a snake. He recovered quickly and stepped forward before Oswin could follow up his attack, cutting high. It was a feint, but not good enough: Oswin blocked low with his buckler and slashed out. Arturo sidestepped the attack with a movement that was more dance than footwork. Turned sideways, he easily avoided Oswin's slash. The Castillian moved backward then raised the hilt of his sword to his forehead in mock salute.

Oswin didn't permit himself the luxury of rage. Clearly the Castillian was faster on his feet, which did not surprise him. He saw the Aldana style, and knew that whatever strange music it used made Arturo far more agile than Oswin. Still, there was a chance. The Castillians consider themselves civilized, and prized their architectural achievements. Fine: his opponent might be used to a fight in the paved streets of Castille. However, in Avalon it was a different story.



Arturo did not disappoint. He came in fast and straight, trying for a narrow slash at Oswin's face. Oswin was having none of it. He tapped the blade out of line with his heavier weapon, keeping his buckler ready for additional defense. His parry was true, and as Arturo's sword passed to his left he deflected it even further with a twitch of his wrist. Oswin's buckler struck steel, sending Arturo off-balance to his right. Unbalanced by the double-impact, the Castillian's leading foot slipped in the mud of the street, and he went down in a heap.

Pausing not even for a breath, Oswin kicked the blade out of his opponent's hand. It went rolling off into the sewage-filled gutter: the perfect place, as far as Oswin was concerned. He placed his blade to the Castillian's throat. "Do you yield?" he asked, knowing the answer.

Sprawled in the mud, Arturo could do nothing but give a feeble look of defiance. If he had raised his head to spit, he would have cut his own throat. "Never!"

Oswin shrugged. With a single slash, he cut the man's throat. There was a cheer from the Avalon crowd as he stepped back to avoid the gout of blood.