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The Palace of the Realm

Mark Wigoder-Daniels looks at what's vexing the bureaucrats this month

Bear in mind that the efficiency of the Tsolyáni bureaucracy is commensurate with a society where documents must be copied by hand, despatched by runner, and filed by archivists who insist on using their own personal systems. The pace at which things get done is different from that in the modern Western world. To get any matter dealt with quickly you must be prepared to hand out "inducements"—perhaps two or three weeks' salary for the officials involved to have any hope of stirring them into a sense of genuine urgency.

Events

Court cases

Most courts are presided over by a senior judge and two deputies. These individuals are members of the bureaucracy. Lawyers, on the other hand, are not bureaucrats but private members of one of those clans specialising in law and custom.

In the court, the judges sit on daises beneath a representation of the Imperial Seal. The plaintiff and defendant involved in the suit sit facing the judges on tiered pyramids of their own, along with their lawyers and scribes. (The defendant sits to the left —ie, the judges' right.) Court cases involving entire lineages or clans are more common than suits between individuals, so usually the plaintiff and defendant are merely representatives of the clans.

The basis for the Tsolyáni legal system is the Book of Golden Signs, set down by Mikotlangme of Purdanim during the reign of the Priest-Kings of Engsvan hla Ganga. The following lawsuits are currently before the courts. It is possible for a case to take months or years to resolve, becoming ever more complex and expensive as additional lawyers are called in.

A demand for shamtla upon Kruom hiArkodu of the Standing Stone Clan, a priest of Qon, who called Lord Vurrighend Khekhessa a slave and an idiot. Lord Vurrighend, of the royal clan of Heru in western Salarvya, is a Lord Adept of Thúmis who is visiting Jakálla to glean certain facts concerning the necropolis.



(This is an interesting case-study in the quirks of the legal system. In theory a foreigner like Lord Vurrighend has little chance of collecting shamtla from a Tsolyáni citizen. But he is very rich, and by bringing the case to court he can deliberately escalate the costs until poor Kruom is reduced to penury. Kruom's lawyers are now employing informers to look into Vurrighend's activities in the necropolis, in the hope of digging up something that would interest the tomb police.)

The alleged murder of Huketlayu hiViridame of the Cloak of Azure Gems by Ta'ana hiRi'inyussa of the Golden Sunburst Clan. He had purportedly raped her, and a week later was set upon by three slaves (apparently Livyáni) in the dining room of his clanhouse. The men killed each other before they could be taken by the clan guards, but a witness claims to have seen them in the company of one of Ta'ana's servants the day before.

The review by the Third Appellate Court of the case of Shénbei hiRanagga of the Red Flower Clan, IInd Circle guard at the temple of Wuru. Shénbei was convicted of grievously wounding Gemelan hiKellukar of the Golden Lintel Clan, a moneylender, on the temple steps. He does not deny making the assault, but maintains he was possessed by the spirit of Teshtesh, Wuru's wrathful 10th Aspect.

The trial of Elulen hiDanolel, a slaver of the Silver Anklet Clan, who has apparently concealed some 100,000 Kaitars of taxable income from the Imperial revenue collectors. The rumour around town is that it is a trumped-up charge because Elulen refused to give a particularly winsome slave to the expropriating official.

The theft of an Engsvanyali iron sword, one thousand antique gold coins and a carnelian amulet from the crypt of the Sankolun lineage of the Clan of Sea Blue. These materials turned up briefly in the possession of one Fii'urik hiBanthadha of the Clan of the Scarlet Planet of Knives, but he has now disappeared. His family is being sued by the Sankolun lineage, although they claim he was murdered by Sea Blue henchmen who took the disputed treasures with them.

The exact dispersal of the possessions of Meshmuyel hiAmnu'a of the Red Stone Clan after his death from a surfeit of tshoridu. His estate amounts to more than 700,000 Kaitars. Two wills exist, the older having a codicil which is more recent than the newer will, but which cuts out his lineage and divides the money instead between his temple and his third wife's clan (Dark Water), where he was living at the time of his death. (By custom a man's legal heirs are the sons and Aridani daughters of his wives. Usually any will which leaves his money to others will be overturned by the courts. In this case, however, Meshmuyel had been all but estranged from his clan for many years, and there is some argument that the Dark Water Clan hold precedence.)

Matters pending

Concerning the other departments:

The registration of quadruplets, twice in one month, by members of the Flowering Life Clan.

The disappearance of Zaren hiBalam of the Clan of the Purple Gem, a up-and-coming young bureaucrat who has not been seen for a month. He was quiet and unassuming, giving no hint of anything untoward prior to his disappearance. Has he been kidnapped? Murdered by foreign agents? Has he become addicted to Zu'ur or Tshoridu? Or fallen madly in love with some foreign lady and followed her home to a distant land? So far only the regular police are investigating, but the longer they go without turning anything up, the more likely the Omnipotent Azure Legion will take an interest.

Officials of the Department of the Seven Commissioners are looking into the unique case of the sorcerer Klanektu hiBarada, formerly of the Black Stone Clan, a lay priest of Ksarul. He has moved into the derelict tower of Mnettukeng the Sorcerer just outside Jakálla, and now styles himself "Magister Mnettukeng". (There are precedents for this among the mightiest wizards, the theory apparently being that taking on the mantle of an ancient master will lend a "residue" of his magical power.) Count Chushel hiSsanmiren has ordered his sub department to investigate Klanektu's current status. If he is indeed to be regarded as the heir and modern incarnation of the Bednalljan wizard Mnettukeng, he may be liable for tax on the property over the last fifteen thousand years.

The promotion of Chargesh hiSsandagash of the Clan of the Plume of White to the rank of Senior Scribe in the Department of the Third Courtyard. This is an unheard-of rank for one of his lowly background. His sly ways and unctuous manner should have prevented his promotion to such an august post. Did he blackmail somebody? (He had been very involved in the Clan of the Azure Gems' lawsuit against the son of a senior Omnipotent Azure Legion official, which, much against expectations, was settled in their favour.)

The assumption of Aridani status by Elena hiSsankolun of the Clan of Sea Blue will be held in two days time. The cooks are preparing a great feast and you can smell the aromas if you just walk down the street outside the clanhouse. Her mother is a Tlakotani from upriver—and ugly as a chlen-beast. It is possible Prince Rereshqala will be coming.

The attempt to trace Meshmuyel hiTengetlaku of the Clan of the Red Sword, who had fled Jakálla with a tax debt of 25,000K (massive due to fines for non-payment) seems to have traced his flight to Heru in Salarvya. He personally insulted the Grand Sequestrator, Count Chushel hiSsanmirin, arranging for the display of a Meshqu plaque denoting engagement with a Chlen (the Badge of Expression of Animalistic Passion—described in the Paeon of Pankothoth of Nirukkai) outside his apartment door. The resulting arousal of hilarity within his clan severely discomfited the grand sequestrator in a manner hitherto unseen since his first wife left him for a Livyáni diplomat.

The constant presence of Messiliu Giyo, a Mu'ugalavyáni potter, seeking to evade taxation on an antique vase found amongst his wares by the inspectorate. Its value far exceeded that of the rest of his stock and, he claims, it was stolen by thieves after the inspection. He claims that the resulting levy of taxes will utterly beggar him. He further claims that it was not his, having been planted amongst his goods by those thieves the previous day—he knows not why.

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