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Blue Murder

How Tsolyáni deal with matters of extreme prejudice

Under Tsolyáni law, homicide is a civil offence. This means that a murder charge can be dealt with by paying financial compensation (Shamtla) to the victim’s family. The appropriate sum depends on the victim’s status:

Social Status	Shamtla
1	100 Kaitars
2	175 Kaitars
3	300 Kaitars
4	550 Kaitars
5	1,000 Kaitars
6	2,000 Kaitars
7	3,500 Kaitars
8	6,000 Kaitars
9	11,000 Kaitars
10	20,000 Kaitars
each +1	extra 10,000 Kaitars

Shamtla is less if the murderer’s social status far exceeds the victim’s. Reduce the figures given above by 25% for every 5 full levels difference in status.

(Thus, an exalted aristocrat of status 21 can cut down a peasant of status 1 with complete impunity, perhaps tossing down just a few copper Qirgal for the sake of form.)

A victim’s family has no grounds for refusing Shamtla if the amount offered is fair. On the other hand, there may be differences of opinion on what constitutes a "fair" payment in the circumstances. Factors such as provocation, prior enmity, insults and the way the killing took place all have a bearing on this.

A particularly outraged family may demand satisfaction under the Manifesto of Noble Deliverance (see below). Alternatively, it is possible to take the case to a civil court. Usually this results in months of wrangling before the court reaches a decision. The court might set a level of Shamtla (either greater or lesser than the sum desired). If the judge deems that the killing was not justified, however, he can order other punishments, ranging from imprisonment to execution.

Exceptions

Shamtla cannot be demanded from an Imperial official or soldier who kills someone in the course of duty. The family’s only recourse in such a case is to invoke the Manifesto of Noble Deliverance or take the matter to an assassins’ clan. Conversely, a civilian who kills an Imperial official or soldier cannot evade the matter by offering Shamtla. Such a killing is accounted an Imperial crime and carries a mandatory charge of imprisonment or death.

Drawbacks

In theory it is possible to murder someone and then wipe the slate clean by paying Shamtla. So, isn’t this an open invitation for a person with enough money to murder anyone he takes against? In practice, no. Firstly, there is the danger that your victim’s clan will refer the matter to a civil court. This is likely to cost them in legal fees, but the satisfaction of seeing you mutilated or impaled may outweigh the attraction of a Shamtla payment. Secondly, no-one is comfortable around a person with a reputation for random violence, and if your victim was a member of your own clan then home life may become particularly strained. Lastly, if your clan elders feel that you are going to go on wasting resources on Shamtla (to say nothing of the effect on the clan’s reputation) then they may well ship you off somewhere you can do no harm—such as a tiny hut on Burru Isle, for instance.

Duelling

The Manifesto of Noble Deliverance is the pre-Engsvanyali duelling code. It is not part of the formal legal system, but is frequently used to settle differences—particularly between nobles, though it is also popular among soldiers and warriors of all classes.

Anyone who feels direly affronted or slighted can invoke the Manifesto. It is a sign that a matter of honour runs too deep to be settled with Shamtla. For the Manifesto to apply, the cause of the dispute must be a matter of public knowledge. Once entered into, the rules of the Manifesto must be strictly adhered to.

Any breach of the Manifesto is regarded as an Imperial crime.

The Manifesto is not an excuse for bullying or social impertinence. A person who is elderly, infirm or unskilled in weapons has a perfect right to refuse the challenge. So does a person whose clan’s status is higher than that of his challenger. An army officer need never accept a challenge from a subordinate within his own legion. However, honour makes it mandatory to accept a challenge from another soldier of equal rank even if he is not your social equal.

Once a duel is agreed, both parties appoint their seconds. Usually a second will be a close comrade, though it is proper ("Lan") for even an enemy to act as your second if you are among strangers. (This might occur, for example, if you were the lone captive taken from a ship attacked by privateers.) In such a case, of course, it is Lan for the second to strive to act in your best interests, whatever his personal feelings.

In consultation with the referee, the seconds must agree on the terms of the duel. These are as follows:

The weapons Both duellists must use the same weapon. The longsword is the most likely choice, but obviously each second will be aiming to maximize his principal’s advantage at the opponent’s expense. Outlandish weapons are not encouraged.

The armour Again, both duellists must wear armour of the same type and quality. Serving soldiers prefer to duel in their legion armour as long as both belong to the same legion, or to legions with equivalent armour.

The extent of the duel The limits to which the fight will go are decided in advance: either to first blood, surrender, incapacitation, or death. This is judged by the seconds and referee in accordance with the seriousness of the matter. For a combatant to deliberately exceed these limits is a breach of the Manifesto.

The time and place If either combatant fails to show up, the referee will make three calls for him to appear. These are at intervals of one yom (90 seconds). If he fails to appear by the third call, he is deemed to forfeit the duel. Duels under the Manifesto are customarily held at the Hirilakte arena. This is not always possible for soldiers in camp or sailors at sea, for example. In all cases, the duel must be refereed and publicly witnessed, and its outcome must be reported to the authorities.

Sorcerers’ duels

Duels involving magic are not common, but there are some precedents—more often in folktales told in clan common rooms, it must be said, than in living memory. The spells and/or Eyes that are to be used must be agreed in advance, and it is a breach of the Manifesto to use any other magic. More usually, sorcerers opt not to use magic in a duel. (Probably because of the inescapable paranoia that the other fellow will know something that you don’t!) Thus you will sometimes see quite aged and learned sorcerers squaring off in the arena with ceremonial armour and maces.

After the duel

The loser of a duel becomes the winner’s slave, and ownership of the armour and weapon(s) with which he fought become his new master’s property. Other than in exceptional cases, however, the winner will sell the loser back to his clan. The sum demanded varies from 50% to 100% of the loser’s Shamtla value, depending on the winner’s disposition. When too high a price is set, this can lead to a further duel with the loser’s second. (The chance to redeem a losing duellist can not always be relied on, though. There was the famous instance of a commander of the Legion of the Portals of Death who became a slave as the result of a duel. His family had fallen on hard times and were not able to purchase his freedom. In view of the winning duellist’s reputation with the sword, the second declined to make a follow up challenge!)

The end of the matter

A duel under the Manifesto constitutes the final word in a dispute. Once the duel is over, the matter is closed and no further discussion or litigation is allowed. Furthermore, the duel is not a trial and its outcome does not establish the rights and wrongs of a case. The duel is an end in itself, a means for both parties to settle their disagreement like gentlemen—or ladies, in the case of Aridani.

Professional assassins

While not part of the official legal procedure, the assassins’ clans are a venerable Tsolyáni institution. They exist to provide redress in cases where the regular legal system is inadequate and where individual circumstances rule out the Manifesto of Noble Deliverance.

There are three major assassins’ clans: the Clan of Whispered Fear, the Clan of Relievers from Life, and the Black Y Clan. (The "Y" in this case is not a letter, but a pictorial representation of an Onel, or three-way crossroads.) Other smaller clans exist. Almost all venerate the gods of the so called Dark Trinity—Hrü’ü, Ksarul and Sáрку—but some of the smaller clans worship Karakan.

Assassins will stalk a victim and beat, cripple or kill him according to their commission. Even if the would-be victim should succeed in defending himself from an attack (rare, given the assassins’ skill) he has only bought himself a reprieve. Having accepted the commission, the clan will persist until it is completed. They leave behind a clan token to show that the attack was properly sanctioned. To attempt reprisals, either against the assassins or the person who engaged them, is not honourable or legal.

To engage an assassins clan, you must visit one of their high- walled clanhouses and there explain why your case is Lan. The basic fee you must pay depends on the severity of the action: 25% of the intended victim’s Shamtla value for a simple beating, 50% to inflict a crippling injury and/or disfigurement, and 100% for a killing. Once this is offered, the assassins will consider the commission. Add the following factors:

- Status** Take your social status minus the victim’s.
- Justice** To the result of 1, the referee secretly adds a number that represents the strength of your case against the intended victim. This ranges from +1 (a very poor case) to +10 (justice is on your side). A successful check on Etiquette or Orator can add +1, and Poet can add +2, up to a maximum of +10.
- Partiality** If you are a follower of Hrü’ü or Ksarul, add +2. If Sáрку, add +1.
- Inducements** The scales of justice are balanced by a little gold. For each extra 20% that you offer above the basic fee for the job, add +1.

The result of these four steps is then used to make a standard 2D10 check. Success indicates that the clan takes your money and agrees to do the job. Ordinary failure means they are unconvinced by the justice of the case—you have the option either to leave, or to immediately increase the sum offered by 20% and try the roll again. Critical failure means your offer is rejected and you are shown out of the clanhouse.

For example: In order to worm his way out of a duel, Tlangten hiSsanyusa applies to have his foe Veshtaru hiChaishyani assassinated. Tlangten is status 18 and Veshtaru is status 14, so this gives +4. The referee judges that there is no honourable basis for trying to avoid a duel: a modifier of only +1. Tlangten has no etiquette or persuasion skills, nor is he a worshipper of Ksarul or Hrü’ü, but luckily he is very rich.

The weapons and techniques of the assassins’ clans are too extensive to cover here in any detail. Disguise, stealth, poison and concealed weapons are all used, of course. The referee should bear in mind that there will be no attempt on the part of the assassins to give their victim a fair chance—these people are trained killers, not hunters. Most ordinary citizens witnessing an attack by members of an assassins’ clan would not think to get involved, any more than passers-by in London would intervene to stop private security guards ejecting someone from an office or bank. Similarly, it is unthinkable for the average person to pass himself off as a professional assassin in order to murder a foe—such an act is not only improper ("Bussan"), but it would attract swift reprisals from the clan impersonated.

Assassins’ Weapons

The Springing Doom

A slim cylindrical dagger which is concealed within a scroll-case, stylus, etc, emerging on a powerful spring when needed.

The Collar of Forever

A garrote.

The Whisperer

A small blowgun with an effective range of 5 metres.

The Summoner upon the Way

A small hand-cocked crossbow with a range of up to 10 metres. So called because its sound is like the single abrupt finger-snap used to summon a servant.

The Teeth of Tomua

Crustacean spines which can be scattered like caltrops. Even a light scratch can induce unconsciousness for up to 30 minutes. Named after a horrid demon with the power of envenomisation.

The Deliverer from Life

A razor-sharp throwing knife, sometimes of steel.

The Dance of Peril

A web of rasping poison-smearred threads strung across a path that the victim will take.

Pa’iya’s Kiss

A thrown glass bottle which can contain acid, inflammable chemicals or deadly fungus spores.

The Tender Companion

An Alash snake which is trained to go towards a victim whom the assassin points out with a rod. These are rare. (In ancient times, Queen Nayari’s court assassin is said to have used a mechanical Alash made of silver.)

The Worms of Death

Deadly worms which remain dormant inside clay "coins". When the coins are broken, the worms emerge and tunnel into the flesh of the nearest person, bringing sickness and rapid death.

For the most part these weapons are more effective by reason of their surprise value than because of any intrinsic merit. Asassins also use most conventional weapons and often are skilled in unarmed combat.

[\[Return to Top\]](#)