

Hu'ón in Action

by David Lemire

Chekú'unish Arodlé, merchant of the Clan of the Bronze Oblong in Khéiris, was making his usual caravan rounds from Khéiris to Fasíltum when, while passing the Kúrt Hills on his way to Béy Sü, he witnessed the harrowing encounter below. The narration which follows is intended to serve as a springboard from which to discuss Hu'ón, the system of unarmed combat taught in the clandestine monasteries of the Temples of Ksárul and his Cohort Grugánu.

It was late in the month of Lasdára and I was despairing of making Béy Sü by Dháhla tenth for the Tsolyáni Feast of the Accession when I had a most unsettling experience. My caravan had stopped for the night at a Sákbe road tower near the Kúrt Hills, their thickly forested heights had been tumbling toward our grey-brown ribbon of road all day. Now they stood just over the wall. The guard tower was larger than usual, almost a castle, thanks to the quarries they provided. In any case, I remember having left my caravan to my clan-brothers and gone on a rare search for diversion in hopes of curing the headache I had, worrying all day over the Arjáshtira River crossing. I found a game of Kévuk being played by eight Kurtáni tribesmen and a mild individual with bright, intelligent eyes, a quick wit, and an indefatigable smile. Playing Kévuk with Kurtáni cutthroats! Something compelled me to stop and watch.

The Kurtáni, with their leather jerkins and braided hair and beards, were quaffing ale by the khu'úma. They laughed, cracked weak jokes and shoved or clouted one another while the other man, who wore a faded black robe and odd ankle-length pleated skirt of thick Firyá-cloth, smiled amiably or spoke as though he were amongst his closest clan-relations instead of a pack of up-country ruffians. Everyone called him Njúmutokh, which means in Tsolyáni simply "gambler". His initial resources lost, the nearly shaven-headed gambler then produced five Suór, the large golden coins of great Engsvanyálu. Betting reached a fever pitch and then suddenly the luck of the Kurtániyal broke. The gambler threw "Ksárul - Black" three times in a row. With a wide grin, he reached out to scoop the Kumésukan toward himself. What followed took no more than a couple Si'íla [one Si'íla equals 4.5 seconds] to unfold.

A Kurtáni to the wanderer's forward left, whom others called Tikkún, seized the Njúmutokh's outstretched right arm just above the wrist. Instantly the gambler was on his feet, his left hand locking Tikkún's hand in place like an iron vise, his right hand rotating inside, up, across, and down in a savage open-hand slash that audibly, and horribly, broke Tikkún's wrist. He then executed three or four left backfist attacks to Tikkún's eyes,

temple, and throat while holding the hapless Kurtáni off-balance by pulling his still outstretched right arm (now broken at the wrist). His final backfist grabbed Tikkún's wicker bowlcap, his right hand flashed forward to grab the Kurt-áni's beard, then, tilting the bully's head slightly back as he came, Njúmutokh drove a thudding knee smash into his opponent's nose. Using a dead man's head for balance, he immediately unleashed a high side kick to his right rear (so hard it made his long skirt pop like a sail!). The kick struck the next nearest Kurtáni just beneath the jaw; he dropped on his face like a stone. By now a third Kurtáni had lunged wildly forward with his dagger aimed at the gambler's stomach. But Njúmutokh was ready. Still on one foot, he grabbed the attacker's knife hand in both his own. Arms stiffly forward, he turned the Kurtáni's attack momentum downward and then circled his knife hand out and up, pivoting inside on his left foot (having by now reset his right, which provided the step-through for the inside pivot). The low inside pivot torqued the Kurtáni's wrist such that his thumb now pointed downward, his knife now pointed at his own belly. And there it plunged. The grab, pivot and plunge were absolutely seamless in their execution.

The knife plunge's power had lifted the unfortunate Kurtáni off his feet. As he fell on his blade yet another attacker lunged over his falling comrade with a wicked short sword thrust. The gambler merely continued his left circle. Allowing the sword to graze his ribs, he grabbed this Kurtáni's wrist with his left hand, locked his right elbow under his opponent's elbow, and then drove further through his continuing left pivot, using his hips and shoulders to throw the poor tribesman while at the same time breaking his elbow and taking his short sword. The landing chipped his tailbone, but this was accidental. I had been able to take but one step backward, frozen as I was by the sheer intensity of the combat. There stood Njúmutokh, a Kurtáni short sword reverse gripped in his left hand, a relaxed, almost playful, expression of readiness apparent in his every form and feature. Across from him stood four surviving Kurtáni, now wielding knives, swords, and staves. Two came on with a shout, one swinging a sword from the wanderer's forward left, the other darting quickly around to the right rear while bringing a stout quarterstaff into play. The gambler melded suddenly and instantly with their converging momentums. He spun on the ball of his left foot toward the forward Kurtáni, intercepting his high arcing sword hand with his own uprising right -- there the iron grip. His reverse gripped Kurtáni sword drove backwards while his grappled victim dove forward across his back and over his shoulder. The backward drive of the gambler's Kurtáni sword ripped into the belly of his assailant, whose forward flip, and the gambler's savage return, tore out the Kurtáni's spleen. Before the return, however, Njúmutokh swung the grappled sword hand of his assailant down across the path of the other Kurtáni attacker's quarterstaff swing, which had missed its target because of the gambler's evasive left spin. The sword bit savagely into the quarterstaff wielding Kurtáni's forward left arm just as his staff hit the hard-packed dirt of the market yard. Exploding in the opposite circular direction, Njúmutokh ripped his reverse gripped Kurtáni sword up diagonally across the staff wielder's throat while chopping down the other assailant with his own sword. He now faced the two remaining tribesmen, a captured sword in each hand. The two Kurtáni turned on their heels and ran. No more than two Si'íla [just over 8 seconds] had passed during the entire combat.

From this description it is clear that Hu'ón is not simply a martial art style using kicking and footwork. Of the fourteen separate techniques employed by the Hu'ón master in the above account, only two were kicks. Three or four were punches. Four were sword attacks. Five were grapple/throw/joint techniques. Hu'ón is known as a kicking style because it does teach spectacular spinning, leaping, and double kicks, the hardest techniques in fighting to master and maintain, but in actual combat it is a very balanced style well suited to dealing with any life-or-death situation. Hu'ón teaches ground fighting and grappling, open hand strikes, punches, and kicks, and even certain weapons, as an integral part of its training program. The short sword, quarter- staff, and assassins' weapons are its specialty. Beginners develop their coordination, balance, and flexibility through a variety of exercises; intermediate students work on increasing their agility, power, accuracy, and endurance through further exercises and sparring; advanced students command such things as timing, perception, speed, and mental strength/ endurance through numerous "secret" challenges. It takes about five years of dedicated training to master the basics of Hu'ón, but even twenty and thirty year Huathudáliyal insist that the learning never ever ends.

For short term espionage missions, for the Ndálu Clan or the other secret societies within the temples of Ksárul and Grugánu, there is a pared down, lean and mean, version of Hu'ón which stresses only the most straight-forward, easily mastered, and instinctively recalled techniques. Chokes, strikes, kicks, and locks that can be used successfully even when exhausted, wounded, or when the mission has gone really wrong: it is this version that is taught to the Omnipotent Azure Legion's political arm. The OAL, it must be said, adds further elements from Dedarátl, Charáge, and just plain filthy brawling. The basic system, however, upon which OAL unarmed fighting builds, is Hu'ón, and the OAL's many Stability worshippers care not one shred about this because they know Hu'ón is much more realistic than Dedarátl or Charáge when it comes to actual combat in some dark, cramped, space far from friends and the protection of the Imperium.

Perhaps a return to the opening narration will further clarify the philosophy of Hu'ón: There again stood the gambler -- two Kurtáni lay behind and four more lay in front or to either side. His unassuming smile became for the first time dark with concern as he arranged the bodies of the dead and examined the condition of the wounded. He asked me for help as he attended the latter. Soon Imperial guardsmen from the castle arrived. They questioned the mysterious traveler briefly and then led him away to their commanders. He acquiesced with that same winning smile. To my utter amazement, he was back within a Thánmra [180 minutes] trying to scrounge up another game of Kévuk. He even wheedled my caravan guards! I approached, asked his lineage and clan, and complimented his warrior skills, saying that I doubted the great hero Pendárte could have done so much with so little in so short a space of time. He laughed, said people really called him Njúmutokh, but failed to identify his clan or any other affiliation. He was so personable I hardly noticed. I agreed to play Kévuk with him, and in the course of our hours together -- the game lasted until dawn -- I learned a little about the philosophy behind his martial art.

Njúmutokh said, for instance, that combat is life and death, and that life and death are both "becoming" -- both "Change in its suchness." He said the great mistake of many styles of martial art, whether armed or unarmed, is the establishment of rigid forms students are required to practice constantly; this completely chokes off their ability to respond in a real, constantly shifting and changing, situation such as mortal combat.

So Hu'ón stresses the "change" in combat and most training consists of sparring with partners instead of learning forms by rote. More later, including Dedarátl and the martial arts of other nations, such as Livyánu.