Duel In 2225

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Rudeness is no longer to be tolerated and the consequenses can be deadly!

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I was sitting in a restaurant in the downtown area of Pittsburgh, the new downtown area, not where it is still radioactive, of course, having a solitary dinner when another customer of this rather seedy establishment slammed into my table.

The abrupt impact of this person bumping into my table caused my coffee to slosh all over my shirt and trousers and my plate of rather unsavory food to fall off onto the floor.

I suppose I should have thanked the fellow for saving my gastrointestinal track a rather painful future, in attempting to digest that unpalatable mess and I might even have done so if he hadnâ t been rude to me personally into the bargain.

â Lousy place to put a table.â he said, â if you were as smart as the wood itâ s made out of you would have had them move it somewhere else.â

â Now just a minute there,â I said, â first you ruin my dinner then you insult me?â

â I didnâ t ruin your dinner, the kitchen did that.â

Somewhat amused by the truthfulness of that statement, I said, â While you may have a point there, it was your clumsiness that spilled my dinner all over me and the floor.â

â Your problem stupid, next time stay out of my way.â

Okay, I know I have a temper but that was simply more than I was prepared to take from this obnoxious individual and I did what came naturally, without another word, I simply punched the idiotâ s lights out. I hit him along side his jaw so hard he spun into three other tables before falling to the floor and he was out like a mackerel.

First, I looked at the other diners this confrontation had disturbed and I said, â I am truly sorry for disturbing you and ruining your dinners and I must admit I regret loosing my temper in this fashion.â Then looking over to the proprietor, I said, â Please replace these fine peoples dinner, at my expense and give this disgusting person my card, which I handed the owner, when he regains his senses.â

I paid for all of their meals, including my own, of course, then left to find a change of clothes and a more appetizing and quieter place to eat.

Over the next two days, I forgot about the incident, so I was somewhat surprised when I answered a knock at my door to find a total stranger stating he had urgent business and may he come in.

As I let him into my room I said, â I donâ t believe I know you, Mr...â

â My name is James Delacourt, I am an attorney and I represent Mr. John Hackman.â

â Sorry,â I said, â I donâ t know anyone by that name either, Iâ m afraid.â

â Oh, I but I think you do, Mr. Thatcher, two days ago you assaulted Mr. Hackman in a public place and he has chosen to take recourse other than going to the police and pressing charges.â

â And just what the hell does he want?â I asked, â money?â

â Iâ m afraid not Mr. Thatcher, Mr. Hackman, he said, handing me a piece of paper, â wishes to challenge you to a duel, in accordance with Pennsylvania State Statute number PA127-835 at a time and place of his choosing. The document I just handed you is official notice of the posting of the challenge and is legally binding. You, of course, as the challenged party have the option of choosing the weapons to be used as well as the protocol.â

â Are you out of your mind,â I said, â he didnâ t challenge me at the time of the brawl, he canâ t just decide now that he wants to kill me.â

â As I am sure you already know, Mr. Hackman was incapacitated due to your actions at that time and he does legally have recourse to challenge you for a period of four weeks from the date of the event.â

â Look,â I said, â just set up a meeting with him and I will apologize for loosing my temper and make any equitable restitution for striking him.â

â Iâ m sorry sir,â he said, â Mr. Hackman has anticipated your request and has refused to meet you anywhere, with the exception of the city dueling grounds.â

â Surely you can persuade him to reconsider,â I said, â I have no desire to have a shoot out with him for Christâ s sake.â

â Mr. Hackman is quite adamant, I am afraid and wishes to meet you at eight AM on the twenty-second of next month, that will be on Monday morning the twenty-second of August. He has specified this date in order to allow time to practice with what ever your weapon of choice may be. If you do not care for a shoot out, as you put it, knives or swords are perfectly acceptable, though somewhat more messy.â

â I simply wonâ t do it,â I said, â and you can run along and tell him that.â

â I suppose that is your choice, Mr. Thatcher, but I am sure you realize that would make you fair game to be shot on sight by Mr. Hackman at any time of his choice, without fear of prosecution.â

â That would be murder,â I said.

â I am afraid not, Mr. Hackman, you would have legally forfeited your life in your refusal to defend yourself when challenged.â

â You mean to tell me there is no way out of this?â I said.

â I am afraid not, Mr. Thatcher, your actions in publicly attacking Mr. Hackman and adding insulting innuendo, leave you no recourse but to accept the challenge and defend yourself.â

Todayâ s modern weapons are usually a needler, which makes a small phut sound when fired and leaves a tiny, although deadly, hole, which bleeds very little, or a disruptor, which leaves little visible sign of injury but literally disrupts the internal organs, causing death and leaves no exterior wound to bleed at all.

â Damn,â I said, then, â If that is the way it has to be, tell him I choose Ruger Vaquero .45 Caliber single action revolvers and the Weaver protocol. Tell him also that he has the opportunity to withdraw his challenge without prejudice.â

â Although that is a strange choice of weapons, I am sure I can locate two of these antiques and I will inform Mr. Hackman of your decision,â said Delacourt.â And with that, he left me to stew over what I had gotten myself into.

Here on Earth, after the Tri Cornered War of Independence by the CTC and the System Planets Government against Earth rule, there was a long period of chaos, very little law enforcement, troops, what were left of them, in control of the government and you took your life in your hands to be out after dark. It took Earth years to clean up the damage and there are still some sites too radioactive to approach safely.

Order was restored, eventually and once again the laws were being enforced. Not only was it mostly safe to be out after dark but also a new code of ethics had slowly manifested itself. Rudeness was no longer tolerated, manors were expected and laws were enacted to enforce good behavior. Verbal rudeness is now a misdemeanor; violence in relation to physical contact due to rudeness is now a class â Aâ felony (a mere step up from a misdemeanor but a felony on your record none the less, three of which convictions can and usually will land you in prison).

I still have none on my record, as I was never charged, much less convicted of any physical violence in this episode with Mr. Hackman.

And now, if you feel you, or your character, have been severely insulted and cannot gain satisfaction in the criminal courtroom, you may choose to either sue (which you may again lose your case) or challenge your antagonist to a legal duel. Should you choose to duel, there are two protocols the challenged party may choose from. First there is the Dryden Protocol. Each party upon refusing to accept an end to the challenge (both parties must agree) will stand back to back and upon the command to commence, take ten (counted by the referee) paces, then turn and fire one round (These are the regulations for firearms, not edged weapons) and stop.

If either party has sustained injury, the duel is over and satisfaction is deemed to have been achieved. If neither party has been injured and no satisfaction has been declared, you once more face away from each other, another five paces are counted and once more you turn and fire a single round and stop, and so on until the weapons are empty. If the weapons are emptied and no one has been injured the duel is declared over and both parties go their separate ways. Satisfaction is claimed by the city and the statistics show this is the case in seventy-six point five percent of these Dryden Protocol duels.

Then there is the Weaver Protocol. Each party loads six or ten rounds. (Governed by the capacity of the weapon, cylinder or magazine) and once more you stand back to back. Twenty paces are then counted out by the referee and you stop, turn and upon command, open fire. The firing continues until both weapons are empty or one of the parties has been injured or killed. Once again, if both weapons are empty and both combatants are uninjured, satisfaction is claimed by the city and the duel is over.

This is a rare occasion, however, as ninety-three percent of all Weaver Protocol duels end in severe injury or death.

The referee is appointed by the city and is a police officer. Any infraction by one party ending in injury or death to the other party makes the duel null and void and the referee, the only other armed person allowed to be present at any duel, will immediately shoot to kill at the offending party.

This is why I chose an extremely dangerous and messy weapon and selected the Weaver Protocol. I sincerely hope Mr. Hackman is taken aback and decides to forego the duel.

Should he decide to pursue his idiocy, I feel confident in the outcome, as I am a member of the â Wild West Clubâ an organization that sponsors gunfight shows put on for the public, target matches and western fast draw contests. I am, therefore, thoroughly familiar with my selected weapon and an expert shot, even if only at targets. On the other hand, I am also a retired Space Marine Corp Veteran with decorations for bravery in combat as well as a Purple Heart for wounds received in combat. In other words, I have been there and done that, on numerous occasions.

Unfortunately, as I understand it, Mr. Hackman had already bragged to everyone he knows, what he was going to do to me on the dueling grounds and felt that he could not back out now without loosing face. He would be a lot better off, of course, if he lost face rather than his life, but he just could not be persuaded to see it that way.

The day finally arrived and I and my friend Space Marine Corp Corporal Ted Cummings, acting as my second, arrived at the official city dueling grounds. The grounds are an old city park, where what used to be a large playground for the children, has been graded flat and planted with the same grass used on golf courses and kept trimmed and neat and level. There are barricades on both ends where protective backstops have been built to stop any rounds from going any farther. The sides, however, are completely open and indeed, bleachers have been built for any spectators who wish to observe, at their own risk, of course. All people who attend these grisly affairs and there are usually quite a few, are searched prior to entry as no weapons of any kind are allowed on the grounds. The only armed personnel allowed are the Referee, his assistant (one referee for each combatant) and, of course the combatants themselves.

As the challenged party, the referee, Sgt. Johann McGreggor, dressed in the standard Philadelphia blue Police Uniform with a holstered disruptor on his hip, met me while his assistant, dressed exactly the same, met Mr. Hackman and his second, who was none other than his attorney, Mr. Delacourt.

Once the introductions had been made Sgt. McGreggor said, â May I escort you to the field of honor?â

â Of course,â I replied, and he led Corporal Cummings and me to the line.

Once we arrived at the starting line, Sgt. McGreggor recited the formal plea of reconciliation, which of course, I accepted, knowing Mr. Hackman would not.

Upon receiving the expected refusal by Mr. Hackman, Sgt. McGreggor examined the two weapons in the wood grained case Corporal Cummings was holding and selected one. This he handed to Corporal Cummings along with six rounds of ammunition.

â You may now load the weapon,â he said to Corporal Cummings and observed closely as all six rounds were inserted into the cylinder and the loading gate closed.

You may now present the weapon to Mr. Thatcher,â he said, then, â Mr. Thatcher you may holster your weapon.â

The same ritual was being performed with his assistant and Mr. Hackman and his second and as soon as both weapons were holstered, he said, â Gentleman are you prepared to commence?â

Both Mr. Hackman and I said yes in a clear voice and we were both escorted to the white line painted on the grass.

â Please take your places on each side of that white line,â he said, â Back to back.â

We did so and I could feel his body heat as I am certain he could feel mine, I must admit, while confident in my ability, I was somewhat nervous at the cold bloodedness of this manor of killing. It was strange to me and seemed to be an unnatural way to go about the business of killing a man.

â I will issue the command â walkâ ,â he said, â and each of you will take one step for each number as I call them out, is this understood?â

When we both agreed, he said, â Good, when you reach step number twenty you will stop and remain in pace, is this understood?â

Once again we both agreed, clearly and verbally as required by law.

â Upon the command to turn, you will both turn and face each other, is this also understood?â

Yet again we both agreed, then he said. â Good, when I give the command â Fireâ you will both draw your weapons and continue to fire until both weapons are empty, one of you is hit or one of you drop their weapon. If any of these events take place you will both stop firing immediately and the duel is terminated. Is this clear or do either of you require explanation?â

â It is clear,â we both stated.

â In the event these rules are violated and one person continues to fire, I am authorized and required by law to stop the proceedings using whatever force I deem necessary, up to and including lethal force. Is that clear to both parties?â

We both answered yes for the final time and then Sgt. McGreggor issued the command â walkâ and began a slow count to twenty.

When the count of twenty was reached, I stopped in place and waited.

â Turn,â he ordered.

I turned to face Mr. Hackman squarely and he turned to me presenting only the right side of his body, to present a smaller target. This is a perfectly legal maneuver and was expected.

Then came the command â Fireâ and I fired from the hip, without ever raising my weapon to line of sight. I continued to fire until Mr. Hackman fell to the ground. I still had two rounds left but the duel was over, my four rounds had all hit Mr. Hackman and he was no longer living.

The End

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