

The Integration Mandate, a Novel Teaser

By Grisli Aklark

One day ago, a mass gathering of local lacertans in protest of the Integration Mandate met in the city center and camped in the parks. Fearing the protest would turn disruptive, as lacertan protests seemed often to do elsewhere in the country, the city government requested aid from federal peacekeepers: a request that was granted. Hundreds of peacekeepers of mixed genera, virtually none of them from the city, arrived to support local law enforcement on the morning of August first, the morning on which the mandate was to take effect.

National Resolution 75, referred to by supporters and protesters alike as the Integration Mandate, was a law forbidding the exclusion of students from any school, at any age, based on genus. The country was divided in their opinions of the mandate. Supporters argued that genus exclusion was backwards and led to education practices that bred discrimination in the hearts of the children. Protesters countered with arguments that cultural and historical education of any given genus was imperative. Interestingly, these protesters were nearly exclusively lacertans.

Lacertans were highly evolved people of reptilian origin. They resembled lizards in body-shape and build, though they had evolved certain physiological differences that made walking on hind-legs possible and comfortable, as well as the ability to communicate with other genera through spoken language. Throughout history, lacertan ancestors had fought many bloody wars in defense of their homelands and in desire to be accepted as natural people in the eyes of the world. Rulers and subjects alike in some countries embraced the lacertans, others despised them.

Countries that embraced the lacertans quickly took notice of their fiercely tribal mentalities. While some lacertans certainly attempted to integrate as quickly as possible into modern society, many more wanted their offspring to grow up lacertan, learn lacertan history and language, and marry other lacertans.

One institution of lacertan culture that was non-negotiable to many was the Lacertan Primary School. These schools were of famously high quality. The teaching profession was honorable and well-viewed in lacertan society, whereas other genera did not put as much of an emphasis on raising and educating excellent teachers. Lacertans in general reached intellectual maturity sooner than other genera, meaning that the curricula in LPSs moved extremely quickly. The typical Lacertan child attended an LPS from age 5 to age 13, before entering a public or

private high school, while most students of other genera did not enter school until 6 or 7 years old.

Lacertan protesters believed that it was the unwillingness of the other genera to accept that lacertan children were intellectually superior that had led to the Integration Mandate. Supporters of the mandate rejected that presumption, instead offering evidence for the fact that LPSs did not emphasize national history, art, or music. LPSs taught instead lacertan history and extra courses of math and science.

Though the Integration Mandate would simply force LPSs to accept students of other genera, the widely-held belief was that this mandate would be the first step in forcing all LPSs to conform to national curricula, as had happened with some minority groups in similar fashions. Lacertans were far from the small minority they once were, and social leaders were determined not to conform.

In the weeks during which the Integration Mandate was being argued in the Senate, interactions between lacertans and other genera grew tense. Lacertan business owners offered their services only to other lacertans, or at least charged people of different genera higher prices. The reaction was tit-for-tat on the other side. Inean, nekon, lupan, and vulpean business owners, to name a few, had shut their doors to lacertans on multiple occasions.

The boiling point was reached on the first of August, when, at approximately noon, the nation's president, a dark-furred vulpean appeared on television, which was broadcast live to the assembled crowd by the enormous, oscillating hologram projectors in the park's center.

"Today, we take a giant step forward towards the future of this great country. Resolution 75 takes effect today. Parents may now begin to register their children for the schools that will educate them for the greater part of their childhoods, regardless of genus. We are proud to say, we are well on our way to eradicating discrimination, wherever it exists."

With this last comment, the rest of the President's words were drowned out by murmuring, talking, and eventually yelling from the crowd. He had effectively equated the existence of Lacertan Primary Schools with the existence of discrimination and racism. Without saying it directly, he was calling the Lacertans racists – a sentiment the lacertans considered racist in its own right.

As dissent grew louder, the assembled peacekeepers seemed to wake up a bit. They assumed more active postures and fidgeted nervously, aware that the inevitable end to this so-far

peaceful gathering was approaching. Within moments of the end of the President's speech, the large riot-control vehicles churned to life and a police commander's voice was broadcast to the assembled crowd via loudspeaker.

"The allotted time for this gathering has ended. Please disperse immediately."

There had not been a predefined allotted time for this gathering. They didn't legally require permission to be in a public park, watching television and conversing, but the police were trying to diffuse a situation that was starting to gather momentum.

Many of the assembled protesters who foresaw what was to follow attempted to disperse, but not before the crowd's overall dissent and disobedience spurred the riot police to action. They formed a perimeter around the central holo-news station. Once a secure area was established within that perimeter, leaders could be seen shouting orders into radios and preparing to move.

Gunan-Hai, a 14 year-old recent graduate of the Central LPS, was at the gathering with two of his schoolmates. He didn't like how the President had phrased things, but he also didn't like how the crowd was behaving. This was liable to get violent if things didn't calm down.

"What's happening, Morna?" Gunan said to his friend in the Diplomatic Common Tongue, often stylized Dicommish. Morna was much taller than him and could see over the crowd.

"I can't tell, there's just a lot of shouting going on," answered Morna in the tonal, tongue-heavy lacertan language.

Gunan-Hai grabbed onto the tree that his friends had been sitting in front of before the speech. Now everyone was standing. Gunan hoisted himself up onto the first limb, just high enough to see over the crowd. A line had formed in front of the holo-news station. On one side, riot police and peacekeepers stood with tall, heavy plexiglass and metal shields, forming a tight circle. On the other side, vocal protesters shouted insults at them in common and lacertan. The police officers seemed indecisive, and the protesters were gaining confidence by the second, some stepping momentarily into the gap between them to spit towards the police.

The loudspeaker came on again. "Disperse immediately. Your presence is disturbing the peace. You are engaging in unlawful activity. Disperse immediately."

The protesters near the front were not deterred. They screamed about their rights but the officers ignored them.

“I think we should leave. This won’t end well,” said Gunan’s friend Farbanu-Qo.

Gunan looked behind him. The majority of the mass assembly seemed to be thinking the same thing. They wanted to leave because they didn’t want to be arrested, but they wanted to stick around and see what was going to happen. He knew some of the faces in the crowd, but most he had never seen before.

Before he could turn back around, he heard what sounded like several muffled gunshots. He turned back just in time to see a canister land just feet away from him, at the base of the tree he was sitting in. He swung down on the other side of the tree and ran to the outskirts of the large circle that had cleared around the canister, which was now spewing a dense white fume.

Before Gunan knew what was happening, a man with a dark piece of cloth tied around his nose and mouth ran into the circle, in one motion picking up the canister and hurling it as hard as he could back towards the police. Gunan realized it was tear gas. Idiots.

Lacertans, like most reptiles, had nictitating membranes – extra sets of eyelids that offered protection to the eye but which they could still mostly see through. Sure, you couldn’t breathe the gas into your lungs or it would burn and agitate and make you cough, but it was hardly as effective against lacertans as against most other genera.

Gunan looked around. He could see other canisters of tear gas flying back towards the police and peacekeepers before disappearing over the heads of the crowd.

“Gunan, seriously, let’s go,” Morna yelled over the sounds of the protesters turning rioters.

Gunan couldn’t object any more, he let them lead him towards the outskirts of the crowd. As the crowd thinned, he could begin to see down the main shopping street in the city, which was full of protesters who were either returning home or who were off to more mischief.

As they walked the street back towards their homes, they were passed by a group of lacertans wearing dark cloth bandanas over their mouths and carrying heavy wooden clubs. They stopped a few doors up from where Gunan-Hai, Morna, and Farbanu-Qo were walking. Gunan saw one of the men smash the window with his club and climb inside, followed by his companions. Gunan recognized the business as an electronics store that belonged to a certain pro-Integration Mandate inean woman.

The men started throwing whatever they could grab from the store out of the window towards the passing crowd. Immediately, those who were walking past ran up and started grabbing electronics and movies and games off the ground in the shattered glass and running off.

As Gunan and his friends reached the shop, one of the lacertans inside threw an armful of videogames out of the window. As they hit the pavement, the plastic cases flew and slid in all directions. At his feet, a copy of the game that Gunan had been saving his allowance for landed. Momentarily torn but making the decision anyway, Gunan leaned down, picked up the game, stuffed it under his jacket and continued walking.

Farbanu-Qo gave him an indecipherable look but didn't say anything. Morna either didn't notice or was pretending not to have noticed. Gunan looked back and saw the men climb back out the window, look around and run back the way they had come.

Ten minutes later, Gunan arrived home. His friends lived farther away from the city center, so he bid them goodbye and climbed the stairs to his family's third-floor apartment. Inside, his mother was sitting in the living room, watching the television. The news was covering the riot, live. An aerial view from a helicopter was being described by a local reporter who was on the scene.

"...throwing rocks and starting fires in the street. Police are using teargas and water cannons to force the protesters to disperse."

Gunan's mother saw him and sprang to her feet.

"Thank the heavens you're alright!" She embraced him. "I told you not to go there. I told you people were going to get angry."

"I know, mom," he managed to say while being squeezed into his mother.

"Are you alright? Were you hurt? They were throwing gas and spraying the fire hoses."

Gunan liked that his mother mostly spoke Dicomish with him, but even so, she was still as overprotective of her brood as the rest of the lacertans.

"I'm fine, ma." He blinked and showed her his extra eyelids. "I didn't breathe any in, either."

"Good, *ch'emi shvili*." My son. "Sit, eat, you've missed lunch."

Gunan sat and ate while his mother bombarded him with questions about the protests and every time he said something bad about what the lacertans were doing, she answered him with an "I told you so."

Gunan's father was a hard-line lacertan conservative, who valued the pride and history of the lacertan people above all else. He glorified the sacrifices made by many lacertan soldiers of the past and spoke like a prophet of the day when lacertans would be treated as absolute equals.

His mother, however, was more progressive. She wanted Gunan to speak Dicomish and to go to high school and university with the other boys and girls his age. She wanted him to represent lacertans by being a good person, rather than spending his life fighting for "lacertan equality," a phrase that could just as easily pass for lacertan superiority in the eyes of people like his father.

From the table he could see the television. The coverage switched from an aerial view over the protest to the view of a camera on the hill beside the holo-news center, where the ring that the police had initially made was not growing any larger. Water cannons on top of riot control vehicles sprayed at protesters who stepped towards police, and occasionally at those on the perimeter that they could reach.

As the camera panned around, Gunan could tell there were still hundreds, if not thousands, of protesters in the main square, but he no longer recognized any of the faces. It seemed to him that the police were waiting for the protesters to run out of steam and leave the area on their own.

Gunan thought this an intelligent tactic. In the past, police had engaged with protesters and tried to force them out of the central area where they had been protesting. This often led to a breaking-down of the thin barrier between police and protesters. More than one police officer and many protesters came out of those encounters bruised, battered, and bleeding.

Now, however, the camera view switched to other cameras in the streets around the main square, where looters were emptying storefronts of their wares, throwing things into the street. A car was flipped in the background of one of these shots.

Just as Gunan began to doubt the intelligence of the tactic, having left the city undefended, a pair of heavy riot control vehicles clearly marked with the insignia of the national peacekeepers rounded a corner and came down the street towards the violence.

When the rioters sighted the trucks, they began running down the street, towards the camera and away from the trucks. Being much quicker, however, the forward truck cut the retreating protesters off and the rear one prevented them from going the other way.

Half a dozen peacekeepers each leapt out of the forward and rear vehicles before they had completely stopped, each officer in full body armor and carrying weapons. The camera filmed as the peacekeepers forced the surrender of the protesters who had flipped the car and arrested them at gunpoint, leading them one at a time to a newly arrived police van.

One of the first protesters had thrashed violently against the restraints of the peacekeepers and had attempted to bite the arm of the one closest to him. He was subdued by an officer with an electroshock weapon and thrown, hard, into the back of the van before he had recovered enough from the shock to control his movements. None of the other protesters resisted.

During that process, one of the peacekeepers standing guard as the rioters were arrested noticed the camera down the street. He pointed at it and said something to one of the other officers. As the subdued man was being thrown into the van, one of them started to approach the cameraman's location. When the man was in the back of the van, that camera's view cut out and the aerial coverage resumed.