

The war with the nation of Venkess, sparked off by the Venkestran invasion of the Acria, has reached a new pitch as both sides continue to pour troops and resources into the Acrian territories in advance of the coming winter. No steps towards a diplomatic resolution of the conflict have been initiated, and such measures seem unlikely in light of Queen Lira VII's declaration in Her Majesty's recent speech to Parliament: "With this act of aggression, the Venkestra have doomed themselves utterly. We shall drive them over the Spine, and thence, into the very ocean." At least four full legions of Dolvanni mercenaries have been contracted by the Lirian military to supplement its conventional forces for the remainder of the fighting season.

Exchange Rates	
All prices in Queen's Oz.	
Alder (LA)	0.240
Emir (JE)	1.371
Emperor (XE)	0.010
Kaiser (DK)	0.079

Acrian civil authorities have independently contracted with the Jhandihari military to provide additional troops to combat the Venkestran invasion. These forces will be traveling through the Ogwehoweh territories and may bivouac in proximity Iron City. Civilians are advised to avoid contact with foreign military personnel. The refugee situation in Acria continues to worsen as the fighting escalates.

The civil defense and investigative agency Iron Inquiry was disbanded last month by its leader Blair Shizzar, who cited concern over the welfare of his colleagues. Mr. Shizzar has since left Iron City. Several former Iron Inquiry members have decided to stay. Of particular note is Jim Hughes, a young and talented combat medic who has performed admirably in recent months.

Trade caravans travelling to and from Iron City have come under attack in a daring series of raids by a pair of mysterious highwaymen. Authorities have stated the raids are acts of mere banditry, and lack any political motivation, citing the fact that both a Lirian and Jhandihari trade envoy have been robbed. Little else has been made publically available about the thieves, other than the fact both men conceal their identities with masks and that one possesses a notably "girlish" figure. An award of 10 Qoz. is being offered by the Lirian Trade Commission for any information leading to the arrest and prosecution of the bandits.

An envoy from the Lirian Royal Consortium of Scientific Academies is expected to arrive in Iron City shortly. Learned scholars from no less than six of the premiere academic institutions of Liria will offer demonstrations of their work, field questions about the latest advances in science and seek fellow scholars in Iron City to recruit for potential acceptance into the academies.

Khenti diplomatic representatives have demanded Heket Ahm Kha, a man they claim to be a known political criminal and rogue Theurgist, be extradited from the Iron City territory. He is wanted for treason by FNK authorities.

After being delayed by the urgency of other public matters, the bill proposed by the Lirian Minister of Public Safety for the licensing of alchemists and regulation of volatile chemicals passed in Parliament by a solid margin. It is expected to pass into law shortly. Practicing alchemists are encouraged to take heed of the coming statutory changes.

Dr. Adalai Wooster remains at large in the Iron City region. A bounty of 200 Qoz. is offered by Lirian military authorities for the capture or proof of death of Dr. Wooster.

Sicherland, Part I

By Ernest Lawsky,
Foreign Correspondent

When I first meet Hlodowig, she is crouched outside the Hauptzelt, the main tent of the Acrian refugee camp outside Iron City, and drawing in the dirt with a stick.

"What are you drawing?" I ask. When she looks up, I see half of her face is wrapped in bandages, a red line of blood that has soaked through the gauze runs from the middle of her forehead, across her left eye, and ends at her check. When she smiles, I see she is missing a tooth on that side of her face.

"Issa axe," she says. Once the drawing is complete, she takes the stick and scribbles the drawing away with such violence that the twig snaps in her hand. She buries the wood in the dirt and sets out to find another drawing implement, and a fresh patch of ground. Around me I see hundreds of these sketches.

I find out later that Hlodowig, "Loddy" to her friends, lived in Alfenberg, in Acria's south, and bore the brunt of the initial invasion of the Venkess Horde. Her mother, father, and brother are gone, and she nearly died from taking an axe in the face, the depth of the wound such that she lost her eye, but was spared death. Some good soul found her before she had succumbed and escaped with her north.

She is five years old. Her birthday is next week.

Amongst the three hundred or so refugees currently residing in the refugee camp, Loddy is not unique. Two of her playmates, Ilsa and Wilhelmina bear scars from the war. Wilhelmina has horrible burns on her hands and arms. Ilsa is missing her right leg below the knee and walks with a crutch.

I catch them in the food line as they whisper and giggle — still little girls despite their wounds. Their dinner consists of bread, a

piece of cheese, and a glass of apple juice, which they consume sitting at benches beneath the rough tan cloth of the Hauptzelt. It is so cold, I see their breath as they eat.

I witness a shortage of medical personnel, medicine, clothing and food. One of the line workers says they need ten times the amount they have for them to feed the expected flood. By the end of the month, it is likely the camp will swell from hundreds to thousands.

I wonder what I can do. I give them the queens in my pocket. I volunteer to serve meals. I clean, gather donations, change bandages, prepare the dead for burial. I could spend all my time in the camp. For three days, I do as much as I can. It is still far from enough.

On the last day, before I leave, I seek out Loddy and find her outside, drawing in the dirt once more. The picture looks like a circus tent, so I ask her, "What are you drawing?"

"Is Sicherland," she says. Translating from the Acrian, it means "safe land" or "a safe space." She puts in the final touches. Stick figures of herself and her two friends, holding hands. "But," she scratches at the bandage on her face, and a red dot blooms beneath the bandage over her eye, "I want to go home."

The Iron City Post-Intelligencer is pleased to announce the **Iron City Threat Index**, a comprehensive and scientific measure of the city's hazard.

The threat index represents a composite calculation of security risks to all law-abiding residents of Iron City, based on a monthly computation of reported murders, missing persons, property theft, public disturbances and unexplained phenomena on a per capita basis, balanced against the level of public services available, such as civil defense forces, medical personnel and ready availability of common supplies and foodstuffs. Scaled 0 to 10.

This month's Threat Rating:

5.37

**On the Dueling
Traditions of Talus,
A Treatise in Serial**
By Khendjer Psametik,
A Scholar of Liria

This is to be the first of a series of articles on the dueling practices of the diverse cultures of the people of Iron City. It is my hope that the series will encourage a spirit of understanding and inquiry between the cultures. My own research is both at an early stage and of a somewhat subjective nature, but I have already learned much that alters my understanding of my fellow inhabitants. By revealing some of the commonalities of the cultures of Iron City, I hope to encourage in others the attitude of solidarity which is required in such an inhospitable environment. By indicating the differences between the cultures, I hope to spark the curiosity of others like myself, who may find that there is still much to learn.

The remainder of this account concerns itself with practical matters of fighting, and may be unsettling to those of delicate temperament.

My initial researches brought me into contact with the Aniyonema, who are often referred to as a "savage" culture. This is something of an uncharitable misnomer, as the rules and mores of their culture are quite complex and may be as baffling to an outsider as those of the mysterious Xingsol or reclusive Philo. Their system of ritual combat, in particular, is as intricate as the Lirian Code Duello, though with considerable differences.

When entering into an agreement to fight, an Aniyonema makes a wager of his teeth, skull, or spine. It is my experience that many people find the idea of fighting for body parts grotesque in the extreme, so it behooves me to point out that these are not the physical components of the combatant, but symbols. Nonetheless, when discussing the outcome of the battles, phrases such as "took his skull" are sometimes

used, which may give outsiders an unduly bloody impression of Aniyonema practices.

In reality, the skull, teeth, and spine are metaphors. The skull is a metaphor for the knowledge and intelligence of the combatant. One who has lost his skull to another must answer questions from the victor honestly and to the best of his ability. He is also constrained from using his mental prowess to lay plans against the victor of their duel. The ownership of the skull is represented by a mask representing the skull, ornamented in red and other bright colors.

The teeth represent the possessions of the duelist. A man who loses his teeth does not immediately find himself destitute, as he keeps all of his possessions. However, the victor may ask for items of the defeated man's property and use these possessions as if they were his own. The teeth are represented by a necklace of animal teeth, frequently worn by the victor.

The spine, as the core of the body, represents the physical power of a person. A man who loses his spine in a duel may not use his strength or physical skill against the victor. Further, the victor may compel the loser to perform physical feats for him. Unfortunately, I must confess that I have not seen the symbolic object that represents the spine.

Curiously, the three wagers are treated as though they are equal in value. That is, one combatant may choose to risk his teeth, while his opponent wagers his spine. It may be that there is an element of knowing one's opponent involved in the selection of bets, so a man who feels that his opponent's knowledge is worth more to him than the risk of his possessions may wager his own teeth against his opponent's skull, but be reluctant to chance his own spine or skull.

Some of the properties, in particular the skull, are

not material objects, so the victor of a battle for a skull may have some difficulty in determining that he has actually received the full and honest answer to a question. However, there is a religious element to the dueling system as well. The Aniyonema believe that one who does not pay the debt he incurs in a fight will bring ill fortune to himself and his tribe, and so for the good of the group and the individual, the debts are honored. I must apologize for my vagueness as to the source of this ill fortune, but plead the mitigating circumstance that my research is as yet incomplete.

I have had the good fortune to observe a fight between Kilau, a man of the Balihu, and Biting Dog Tick of the Aniyonema. Kilau seemed to fight with greater finesse, but what Biting Dog Tick may have lacked in precision he made up in ferocity. The battle was not confined to a formally delineated dueling ground, but ranged over the area around the Aniyonema encampment, with each combatant trying to gain a favorable position.

In the course of the battle, there were several events that would not have been accepted in a duel between Lirian gentlemen, but are seemingly common in these less formal combats. The first took place before the fight was joined, when Biting Dog Tick consumed some substance from a small bag. I must plead my ignorance as to the nature of this elixir, but its enervating action was unmistakable. To gain an unfair advantage through the use of stimulants would be regarded as an offense against honor in some cultures, but here it passed without remark. The second event took place during the fight. Kilau was fighting in a two-handed style, but had been forced to drop one of his weapons. There is no formal system of selection of seconds in the Aniyonema duels, so this was more an expression of support for Kilau's suit than a part of the duel in itself. The extra weapon

may have decided the fight, for Kilau quickly rallied and defeated Biting Dog Tick. As a consequence, Kilau metaphorically has Biting Dog Tick's skull, and may ask questions of him or obtain his assistance in mental matters.

**The Way of the
Scavenger**

By Leilani,
A Jhandihari Resident of
Iron City

The last time I was in Iron City I feel I may have offended some persons through my scavenging actions. It was not until I had a discussion with a fellow scavenger that I realized; those in Iron City do not fully understand the circumstances of our actions.

As some of you may know, us scavengers survive in the harshest of environments. Most would perish if thrown into the whirlwind that is our lives - living one day at a time. You see for us, scavenging is a way of life or death. We must eek out our existence as best we can. This sometimes forces us to do things that other may find repulsive or immoral.

For a scavenger, coming across a dead body in the wilderness is like a treasure chest. Finding an extra set of shoes, a new hat, some trinkets to sell at market for food and supplies. You see, to a scavenger, a dead body, or even an unconscious body, is an opportunity knocking on our door.

So please, do not snarl at us when we pick through the bodies of the recently deceased. It is merely a way of survival for us and we mean no disrespect for the recently departed. It is just something we have evolved over time to survive in the harsh reality of our lives. I know it may appear savage, but it works for us.

The opinions of the authors presented herein do not represent the attitudes and opinions of the Iron City Post-Intelligencer or its staff.

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