



# Crockett's Spirit

*Impavidus Scribere Veritas — The Brave Write the Truth*



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*Merry Christmas*

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## A Yuletide Nugget

by CDRE Logan Kale

Did you know that...it was in the year of the first airing of the Star Trek: Voyager episode "Death Wish" in which the Q named Quinn was featured and made a brief attempt to hide the USS Voyager by disguising it as an ornament on a Christmas tree. Because of that, Hallmark released a Christmas tree ornament of Voyager in the same year, 1996.



Miniaturized Voyager Disguised as Christmas Tree Ornament



Ornaments on Tree as Seen thru Voyager's View Screen

Source: <Top Secret>

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## Fiction

### Element 82

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

The survey team consisted of the mission commander, two security personnel, and the science team director. As they materialized in the great chamber they came face to face with more than fifty armed guards. "Please lower your weapons," one of them said.

"Instruments down, gentlemen," the mission commander said firmly. Hands came down. To the speaker, "These aren't weapons. They're sensing devices. Our weapons are secured. I'm Mission Commander Theo Crane of the SRS Ranger. On my right is Science Team Director Jim Butcher. On my left are First Lieutenant Briggs and Second Lieutenant Renault of our ship's ECCO security detachment. Our intentions are peaceful. Your weapons are not necessary."

The one who spoke turned and nodded. He and fifty-four guards holstered their weapons. "I am Gab Rephal, Magistrar of Harkenow, one of four continents on this, our planet Cretain. Why are you here?"

"We are scientists and explorers, seekers of knowledge," Crane replied. "We are from Telluris, the First Pannade of Planet Earth. As we neared your planet, our systems began malfunctioning. We were fortunate to be able to establish an unstable orbit before our engines quit entirely. Some force on your planet disabled our ship. Our scanners detected an anomalous energy reading and traced it to this general vicinity. We came down to investigate."

"That agrees with my findings, Mission Commander," Rephal confirmed. "All our systems have been disrupted as well. Our communication centers are down, our power and traffic control systems are failing, and our travel conveyances are no longer operating. It is only by the grace of *Prah* that our above-ground traffic had enough time to return to the surface without mishap. Our detectors pointed in this direction before they too ceased functioning. I suggest we continue on."

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The great chamber was a natural formation; long, high and narrow. Granite interspersed with veins of marble, agate and smoky quartz comprised the walls and ceiling. A great door stood at one end. Entrances to three tunnels stood at the other. Beyond one of those entrances lay a mysterious, powerful energy source.

Rephal spoke. "I know these halls. I will take two squads this way." He pointed to the left tunnel. "Four squads are at your disposal. First one to find anything will send runners for the others."

Crane replied, "Agreed! Briggs, you and Renault take two squads and search the right tunnel! Jimmy, the rest of us will search the middle tunnel. Any questions? Good! Let's go!"

Before long, Crane's team entered a dimly lit chamber quite unlike the one they had just been in. A pivoted turret with eight barrels pointing in as many directions was casting blue-white thermal dots onto the walls, melting the lead that comprised them. On the floor were eight small cars on ball-rollers vacuuming the liquid that flowed freely down the walls. They, in turn, through flexible tubing, were directing the melt into a larger main tube. The main tube passed through an even larger, circular, window-like opening in a section of wall near the floor at Crane's two-o'clock. Liquid lead was literally being sucked out of the chamber. A lone individual monitoring the extraction process drew a weapon as Crane, Butcher and their two backup squads approached.

Crane dispatched two squad members to go out and bring the others, then spoke. "Before you shoot all 18 of us, please, tell us what you're doing here."

The individual, standing no more than a meter and a half high, answered in a trembling voice. "A wandering star is nearing my world. Its rare form of radiation can destroy our atmosphere and annihilate our people. Your walls are pure element 82. We can emulsify and suspend it high above our planet in order to protect our atmosphere. There is more than enough here for our needs."

"I have no problem with what you're doing," Crane responded, "but I'm not from this planet. I have no authority here. The one you need to talk to will be arriving shortly. What happens to your project will be up to him."

The individual relaxed his stance a little, but he didn't lower his weapon.

Crane shifted his attention. "Jimmy, got a fix on the cause of the disruptions yet?"

"It's not the extraction process, Commander," he said as he read from his sense-pad. "That aperture over there with the hose running through it is a spatial rift, a hole in space. That's where all that troublesome energy's coming from."

"That explains how our friend got here," Crane mused aloud.

When the other teams arrived, Crane briefed Gab Rephal. Then Rephal spoke. "Please lower your weapon. We are not interested in harming you." He introduced himself, Crane and Butcher. Then he asked, "Who are you?"

The individual holstered his weapon and answered in a now steady voice. "I am Glinn. I am a geological engineer. My world is at your mercy, Magistrar."

"How much more time will you need," Rephal asked.

Glinn replied, "About six turns of your planet will do, but I would like to have eight for a margin of surety."

"Then you shall have eight of our *rens*, to extract all of the dark metal you will need," Rephal assured him.

"Thank you, Magistrar Rephal. I... Thank you."

Crane interjected, "If I may, Magistrar?" Rephal nodded and Crane shifted his attention. "Glinn, can you either close your spatial aperture around that tube, or turn off whatever generates it for a few hours? I need to stabilize my ship and these people need to stabilize and restart their various systems, all for safety's sake."

"I can reduce the size of the aperture, but I will no longer be able to communicate with my world, and I will be unable to receive technical support or supplies once I have done so. I will inform my people, and then I will proceed."

"Excellent. And don't worry, you're not alone in your endeavors. On board our ship we have engineering staff who can assist you, and any equipment you might need we can provide, fashion or manufacture. We've got your back."

"I do not foresee any problems, Mission Commander, but if I encounter any, I will seek your help. I am much appreciative. Thank you."

With security no longer a concern, Crane released his security team to return to the ship. Rephal likewise gave leave to his guards to return to their regular duty stations.

A short while later, Glinn spoke, "The aperture is closed, Magistrar; it is completely sealed. The energy is no longer a problem."

"That is good news," Gab Rephal said with a sigh of relief.

"Good news indeed!" effused Theo Crane, "News that calls for a celebration! Gab Rephal, Glinn, I would like very much for the two of you to join Jim Butcher here, and me, on board my ship, for food, drink and entertainment, all to laud our success today, and to commemorate our new friendship!"

"I would be very happy to join you, Mission Commander," Gab Rephal responded.

"Your unexpected invitation honors me, benevolent sir," Glinn added. "I accept with deep gratitude."

Splendid, gentlemen. I'll arrange transportation. And call me Theo—we're all friends here.

## **GLOSSARY**

- ECCO – Ether Corps Celestial Operations
- Ether – a medium once believed to comprise outer space
- Magistrar – Governor, administrative leader
- Pannade – a united body of people comprised of two or more independent nations, nation states, states, provinces, or any other such territorial entities
- SRS – Science Research Ship

# Fiction

## Star Wars - Ashi's Shame

### Chapter 4: The Jedi

by LTJG Ashinaga

Drak Ogoro walked down the bustling marketplace of Devon Port. He had already hired a new band of mercenaries to assist him. Two walked with him right now, for his protection here, the rest waited at his ship.

Drak stepped into a bar and walked over to a blue man who quietly scrutinized the other patrons. He had a keen memory for every wanted poster in the galaxy, which meant few could get passed his examination.

"Bort." Drak got the blue man's attention.

Bort looked at him with a disinterested face, "I've no business with you, Rodian Slaver."

"I need to hire you for a special mission."

Bort took a good swig of his liquor and then shook his head, "You can't afford me."

Drak dropped a large coin on Bort's table, "That's to start with. When I'm done, we will split the cut of the biggest bounty you've ever seen."

Bort picked up the five hundred credit piece and eyed it closely to see if it was a fake. He smiled hideously at Drak. "I'm listening."

Drak casually looked around to quickly check for any interested ears, "Look, I can't tell you much here. I don't want to tip anyone else off to what I'm up to. If we make it through this with our bounty, we'll all have enough loot to make a Hutt jealous."

Bort picked at his teeth. "Why share?"

"I need people for this. I'm looking for mercenary bounty hunters without connections to anyone. Loners. I don't need Hutts, Black Sun, or anyone else sticking their noses into this. Unless you changed your principles, you work alone and that's what I need."

Bort was quiet for a long moment and then finally cracked a smile. He gave off a soft, but deep laugh, "I believe you. Fine. I'll take the job, Rodian."

"Good. Then we have a deal. Meet..."

Bort suddenly grabbed his arm and held it tight. "Just know this, Rodian, if this doesn't play out, I'll turn you in to the Hutts for what they want."

Drak shook off this man's grip. "Fine. Meet me at my ship tomorrow morning. Tell no one else."

Bort took another large swig. "I can keep my mouth shut. Especially when money's involved."

Drak waved at his two other mercenaries and they followed him.

Out on the street again he headed deeper into the marketplace. The further he traveled the seedier the market looked. The woman on his right leaned in and asked, "Why look more mercenaries. Split bounty too much?"

He shook his head, "I've got enough people now. I need a weapon."

They turned down an alley and the seedy street be-

came a wicked darkness. This was not the place where any honor could be found.

The man to his right asked, "Whataa you needaa more weapon foraa? Blasters no goodaa?"

"When you fight a Jedi, you need something better than a blaster." This was the first time Drak had mentioned the Jedi to his new associates. They both were stunned, each a bit put off by the notion. If it were not for the amount of money he had already paid, they would back out of this deal right there. Drak knew this and that is why he is paying so much up front.

Drak leaned over and pulled a cloth away from a very short door. He opened it and nearly crawled inside. The room was smoky dark with only a few red lights to see by. Shadows of weapons could be seen, but it was hard to make out what they were. Mostly because these were some very illegal weapons.

A raspy, deep female voice greeted them, "Drak, you old scoundrel. What you doing here?" A female Dug carried herself out of a small room and smiled at Drak with her few teeth. "Going to put on show? I like to watch! So good with sword."

Drak could not hold back the arrogant smile, "No, not doing sword fight demonstrations anymore. Those days are behind me."

"Aw, too bad," she bemoaned, "You good. What you want from me?"

While the mercenaries with Drak began to find a few of the terrible weapons of interest, wondering which he would ask to fight a Jedi with, Drak merely leaned over and said, "I've heard rumors that you have a special weapon in your stock."

"I have many special weapons. Look, look, you find what you want." She gestured toward the walls around them.

"Not one of these. The weapon you bought from Arteno."

Her animated actions slowed down and she gave him a curious look, "What you talk about? I know no Arteno."

"Sure, he doesn't exist. I don't care about him, I just want the weapon he sold you."

She was nearly angry. "You cannot afford. It cost too much."

Drak put out ten thousand credits on the table. "Is this enough?"

Her greedy little eyes lit up at the sight of all that money. "You have my attention."

He put out another ten thousand, "Does this buy the rest of your attention?"

She slowly nodded and brushed the pile of coin into a secret compartment behind the counter. "Wait, wait. I bring you...special item."

"Whataa weapon worth thataa much?" The male mercenary asked.

"This one." The Dug woman returned with a small bundle of cloth and put it on the counter. Drak untied it and pulled aside the cloth.

The female mercenary gasped. "A lightsaber?" Drak picked it up, stunned to be finally holding one

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of these legendary weapons. He looked it over for a second to figure out how it worked. He found the button and turned it on. A long, green blade extended from the tip. "Let's go carve us a Jedi."

Two days passed as Ashi continued up toward the mountains. He had crossed the rolling plains and was now trekking through the forested foothills. The days were pleasant, but the nights were chilly. Fall would soon grace this hemisphere of Jahala.

A large fallen tree stump lifted from the ground and floated over to join another three that had already been neatly arranged around an unlit campfire. Ashi finished placing the log and then sunk down to the ground with crossed legs. He used a small laser-igniter to start the fire and then unfolded some dried leaves around a bit of cured fish he had packed.

He slowly ate the meat as he stared deeply into the fire. The waves of heat rustled his mane and the fur on his face. His mind had wandered so far away from this moment he hardly noticed the warmth. Being alone this long left him to his own thoughts. He spent a great deal of time alone, but it was mostly spent meditating on the force and training with his swords. Walking toward the mountains prevented either practice and this let him just think. What he thought about was how his life has changed so much, so many things out of his control had brought him to this point. Deep in that blaze of his simple campfire, he thought about his childhood.

#### **Twenty-three years previously:**

A young Jahalan nurse held a small child's hand as she guided him down the street. While the males have the majestic mane around their heads, the females have long, soft hair. This nurse was very pretty, but her beauty was offset by the sorrow in her face.

"Please, little one, no more tears. You mom and dad wanted you to be happy." She said this knowing it would not stop a five-year-old child from crying under the circumstances.

They arrived at a large building, the academy for the local branch of the Hakashan Guard, an elite training school for Jahalan fighters. Out back, two lines of strapping young men practiced fighting techniques, their master barking out commands and correcting mistakes.

An older man opened the door and looked down at the boy first. He then addressed the nurse, "Is this the child?"

"Yes. His mother passed only this morning."

The big, strong, rather threatening man knelt down and kindly placed a hand on the boy's head. "I'm very sorry, little child. Your mother and father were good people. Did they give you a name yet?"

The boy was far too scared and sad to speak.

The nurse said, "No, they did not get to hold the naming ceremony before they contracted the plague."

"How did he avoid getting sick?" Binjin, the master of this school, asked.

"I don't know," the nurse said, "the doctor checked him out every day to be sure. He's healthy. But, he has no family left; they were all taken by the plague."

Binjin took the boy's hand, "Come. We'll get you something to eat and find you a place to rest. You'll be safe here."

"Thank you, Master Binjin, I know he's young for the school..."

Binjin stopped her, "I'll do everything I can for this one. Just make sure that someone stops that damned plague from killing us all."

The nurse quietly responded, "Chief Nolith has sent out a request for help from the Republic. They're our only hope now."

"Good."

Binjin took the child into the school's bunk room for the newest cadets. There was a bed already made up for a child this size in the back of the room. A few toys were even lying around. This was not standard issue, it was much smaller and friendlier than the others. Great care had been taken to make this a special place.

Binjin gently lifted the boy onto the bed and then knelt down low. He wiped the wet fur on the child's face. "Little one, I'm so sorry for your loss. I lost my own son to this plague a month ago. He was just a year older than you. Since you have no family to give you a name, I will give you his. Ashi."

Little Ashi sniffed back his crying and finally looked this man in the eyes. He nearly jumped out of the bed and hugged him, weeping all the harder again. "I miss my mommy and daddy!"

Master Binjin held the child. "Little Ashi, everything will be alright."

A week passed and little Ashi now stood out back with a small staff in his hand. He practiced with it like a much older student. He only hit a special wooden statue designed for training, but he was almost too small to reach all the marks.

The statue had several arms on swivels that swung around as you hit it, so to respond. You had to dodge it when it spun and then hit it appropriately to counterattack.

"Very good, student Ashi. You hit almost half the marks." Binjin proclaimed, loudly. Now he addressed the other students around the yard practicing on their own various tools. "You can learn something from this cub. He's focused and listens, in one week this five-year-old has progressed faster than most of you when you joined at age nine." More than one of the older students grumbled they didn't like being compared to a cub. Binjin enjoyed bristling their fur, it

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gave them the motivation to do better. He was about to say something when everyone gasped and looked up in shock.

A medium sized Republic transport appeared overhead and headed directly for the open field near the village.

Binjin had been asked by the chief to be present when the Republic representatives arrived, so he announced. "Keep practicing, I'm going to join the chief. Don't conduct any sparring while I'm away." With those orders, he left for the meeting. He didn't want them fighting without their master on hand. Some of the more brash students could get too rough and he worried about the younger ones being hurt.

The aft section of the transport opened and the landing walkway was extended. Soon several people exited the ship to meet the gathered Jahalan.

A woman in regal attire bowed to the chief, "I am senator Grinth of the Republic." She was a white skinned, red haired woman, rather striking to look at. She held out a hand to her guests, "This is captain Gillun, doctor Rimisk, and Master Yoda of the Jedi council."

Chief Nolith, a very old Jahalan, bowed back to her, "Senator, I welcome you to our humble planet. We were not expecting so many dignitaries from the Republic when we called for aid."

Senator Grinth answered, "Our mission does not only include your planet, sir, but several that have been infected by this terrible plague. It is our desire to cure this illness and hopefully stem the tide of what could be a terrible pandemic across the galaxy. Since your world is not a member of the Republic, it was decided that representation should be present in case of any diplomatic issues."

Chief Nolith smiled, "Just help us cure our sick and stop the deaths, that is all we ask. Come, I will show you to our hospital." He led the representatives into the village.

The doctor gave a command into his wrist communicator and several aids came out with large containers on hover-carts.

Binjin stayed the longest and kept an eye on the strange little man with a genial smile.

Yoda didn't have to be told he was watched. He stopped and looked at the glowering lion-man. "Concerned, are you? A Jedi, have you not seen before?"

Binjin slowly shook his head, "Not in person. I know of the Jedi though: peacekeepers, bringers of justice, protectors of the Republic."

"Our reputation, you have learned correctly."

Binjin continued to frown, "What purpose does a Jedi need for a mission of medical aid? I promise that we're no threat, we're in need of help."

Yoda walked on with Binjin beside him, "A peacekeeper, you must be? Worried you are about me. No need to worry, no need to worry."

"It is my job to worry. I teach these people to protect themselves."

"Not good, worry is. No threat to your peace, am I. An observer from Jedi council is all I am." Yoda laughed, "To see your teaching, I would like."

Binjin agreed and led Master Yoda back to the school while the others headed for the hospital.

# Fiction

## A Stargate Atlantis Story - 13

by Col. Shreya Rose

### Amargosa's Room

Amargosa was taking time to meditate before the impending trouble started. The Phoenix had left to keep an eye on things as she couldn't sit still and wait. Amargosa was seated in a lotus position on her balcony when she heard someone at the door.

"Come in," Amargosa said. She rose to her feet and started back into the room.

The door opened and Sheppard was standing there. Amargosa looked over at him and smiled.

"Colonel Sheppard, to what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"I came to talk to you about the Phoenix."

"What about?"

"Everything you know about her," Sheppard said.

"First, what do you know about her?" Amargosa asked.

"Not very much, just that she is a myth where I come from," Sheppard replied.

"A myth?" Amargosa said, "As you can see she is no myth. My people have believed in the Phoenix for generations. It is only now that she has made herself known to us in her true form. A bird consumed by fire, beautiful, colorful feathers mixed in among the flames." Amargosa took a deep breath. "My family has been the caretaker of the Phoenix since the dark times when the Wraith started to destroy our world. I became aware of my responsibilities only just recently."

Amargosa took out her family history album. "This is my heritage, my family tree passed down to me. I have read through only a quarter of the things in this book up to now."

"Wow." Sheppard said as he saw how large the family history tome was.

"It's hard when your parents keep secrets from you all the time, telling you 'You are not ready to find out.' Erick gave me the book a few hours ago. I only wish that my father had given it to me instead...long ago."

"Your father was trying to protect you," Sheppard said.

"Protect me? From what? My destiny? I don't need any protection! The Phoenix has been my protector!" she protested somewhat loudly.

Sheppard just listened. He was also there to talk to Amargosa about what was going to happen. He understood what she was going through.

Amargosa took a deep breath and sighed. She immediately felt ashamed for having yelled at Sheppard. "I am very sorry for being angry at you. I know it's not your fault."

"Don't worry about it. You needed to talk out your feelings a bit."

"But you did not deserve it. Again I am sorry for yelling at you." Amargosa said. She grabbed her shawl from her bed. "Shall we go?"

Sheppard nodded and let Amargosa leave first. He still had a lot of questions, but would wait for another day. He followed right behind her into the hallway.

# Fiction

## The Alfore Encounter—39

### "Hotel Woes"

by CAPT Two Wolves

Skonn and Janice entered the spacious hotel lobby and were met with an orderly mass of people waiting in multiple lines for rooms.

"I thought you said we were early," Janice grouched.

"We are early," Skonn responded. "There is a gymnastics competition going on across the way,"

"Well, I don't like the look of those lines," she said. She truly didn't feel like standing in line or waiting around in the lobby. Every seat on the numerous guest sofas and club chairs was taken. Additionally, people were standing in tightly knit groups on the sides, with piles of stacked luggage beside them. Obviously they were team members waiting to be assigned their shared rooms or suites.

"Like the Ferrengi who are known for their financial and business acumen, the Azo excel in the service and hospitality industry. We need not wait at all," Skonn said, as the left side of his mouth quirked upward. He ushered Janice over to a counter at the far left side of the lobby where only one person stood in line. The gold plated sign declared *VIP Check In*.

The female Azo concierge, dressed in a snappy dark blue hotel uniform with a matching infinity scarf which could double as a head covering, helped them. Her name tag identified her as *Tisra*.

Janice marveled at Tisra's appearance. Although completely bald, the skillful application of eyebrow pencil, a bit of eye shadow, lipstick, and blush, highlighted her dark brown eyes and contrasted beautifully with her flawless, honey colored skin-tone. *Proving one doesn't need hair to be beautiful*, Janice mused.

Five minutes later they were checked in and given old fashioned key cards to their shared room. Janice was stunned at the architectural ingenuity and beauty of the hotel as they rode the glass lift up to the third floor.

The hotel was a huge open, air atrium-style structure with each floor having an inside balcony. The entire roof was a skylight so that the hotel was lit entirely by sunlight during the day.

As she gazed down at the first floor, Janice noticed that there was an inside waterfall, a fish pond, and two fancy restaurants, both of which were completely packed. Liveried wait-staff scurried about serving a veritable galaxy of delicacies to hungry diners.

"We can eat there later if you wish," Skonn said, as if reading her mind. Janice glanced at him as if he were nuts. "It is all expenses paid, Janice," He added.

"I think later. All I want to do now is unpack and chill out for a bit," Janice replied.

"That plan will have to wait," Skonn countered. "We have to sign in and get our event credentials."

"Jeez, more lines?" Janice asked.

"Not necessarily. The venues have V.I.P. check ins also," Skonn explained, as they debarked the lift and headed around the balconied hall to their room. Skonn placed his card against the door's card reader. There was an audible click as the door unlatched. Both entered the room, bringing the luggage-laden anti-grav carrier with them. Skonn dutifully removed the luggage, then folded and stowed the carrier.

"Wow, this is nice!" Janice said as she surveyed what was to be their temporary home for the next three weeks.

The room was a mini suite with a kitchenette, a tiny living area, one large bedroom with two queen sized beds, and one bathroom. There was a handy privacy partition one could use to divide the bedroom in two.

"Choose which side you would prefer and I will take the other," Skonn said, as he hung Echo's nest from a convenient hook in the ceiling. Echo, grateful for the opportunity to stretch her wings, flew a couple of laps around the room, then settled into her nest. Janice busied herself with laying out things on a dresser in the bedroom and in the bathroom.

All of a sudden, Echo flew from her nest and darted into Janice's chosen side of the bedroom with Skonn following closely behind her. Janice stared as the little dragon hissed and zeroed in on a large, spider like insect that had scurried up the wall. Echo's eyes turned bright red.

"Kroyka, Echo!" Skonn shouted. But, it was too late. Echo puffed out a spark of flame and the insect dropped from the wall and fell smoking to the floor with a soft thump. Echo hovered over it and continued to hiss. Skonn called her to him, and she flew back and perched on his left shoulder.

"What the hell is that?" Janice asked, as she knelt to examine what still smoldered on the carpet.

"Do not touch that!" Skonn warned. "Please bring me my case," he added. Janice fetched what looked like an old style doctor's bag from his stack of luggage and handed it to him. Skonn knelt, opened the bag, pulled on a pair of disposable plastic gloves and then selected a pair of electronic tweezers. One of many, Janice noticed. He poked the insect for a few seconds, withdrew a burnt sliver, and held it up for Janice to see.

"This is clearly an inorganic device," Skonn pointed out, "cleverly designed to resemble a Hithra, a common Azotan spider."

"Is her appetite for tasty bugs the reason why Echo went after it?" Janice asked.

"Negative. Echo does not like Hithrae. However,

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Fyrin Dragons can instinctively detect electronic spying devices. That is why she attacked it," Skonn said, as he crushed the sliver with the tweezers. He plucked a plasticine baggie from his case, deposited the remainder of the spider into it and sealed it. Then he stripped the gloves off and tossed everything back into his case.

*I wonder if he's ever had forensics training, Janice pondered. If he did, why isn't there any mention of it in his Starfleet record?*

"That particular device possessed a long distance resonator which would've recorded and broadcasted everything we said and did in this room," Skonn explained as he rose to his feet.

"Who'd want to know that kind of information?" Janice asked, "The Klingons?"

*The Klingons and anyone else in cahoots with The Shining Path, Skonn thought to himself.*

"Perhaps. Unfortunately, this incident proves that this room is no longer safe to occupy. I strongly advise that you repack your belongings. I will alert the V.I.P. concierge that we require an immediate room change," Skonn said instead.

"Skonn, you saw that packed hotel lobby. There's no way in Hades they'll be able to give us another room at this late stage," Janice told him. She was feeling somewhat like Mary, wife of Joseph and mother of Jesus, when there was no room at the inn in Bethlehem.

*Perhaps there's a stable we can sleep in, she thought.*

"Do not underestimate this Vulcan's power of persuasion," Skonn said as he picked up the room communications headset and requested to be connected to the V.I.P. concierge. Meanwhile, Janice sighed and went about repacking her things.

After ten minutes of logic-laced negotiating, Skonn put the headset back down.

"Well?" Janice asked, hands on hips.

"A room is being prepared as we speak," Skonn announced.

"In the same hotel, not fifty clicks away?" she asked, skeptical. Janice was well aware of the old hotel trick of calling a sister establishment halfway across the planet to arrange another room, because they were overbooked.

"Affirmative. Give me your key. I will go down to exchange keys and return to help with the relocation," Skonn said. Janice handed him the key and plunked herself down on the sofa to wait. Echo settled herself on Janice's shoulder and chirped happily into her ear.

"Thank you Echo. You definitely deserve a bowl of popcorn once we settle in," Janice said as she stroked the dragon's snout.

Skonn returned fifteen minutes later with new keys and a new room assignment. They loaded everything back onto the anti-grav luggage carrier and took the lift back down to the first floor. Once there Skonn led

them through a virtual rabbit's warren.

"Where in the heck is this room, behind the Neural Zone?" Janice asked, incredulous.

Skonn answered by leading her to a door on their right.

"At least it'll be very quiet. But, I'm gonna need a tricorder to find my way back here," Janice grumbled. The old Academy joke was "Vulcans never got lost, but Starship Captains needed navigational equipment to find the head."

Skonn keyed open the door and they entered.

"Wow!" Janice said. The room was a full suite with a full kitchen, and living room. Janice went to investigate the sleeping accommodations and came back scowling. Skonn was too busy removing luggage from the anti-grav carrier to notice her sour expression.

"Skonn," she called. So intent was he on his task, the Vulcan didn't hear her.

"Skonn!" Janice shouted in her command voice. Skonn dropped the piece of luggage he was handling with a thud and stared at her with both eyebrows raised.

"Have you noticed something very different about this room?" she asked.

"No, I have not," Skonn replied.

Janice sighed inwardly remembering Skonn was socially inept.

"There are fresh cut exotic flowers in a vase on the living room table, for one." She started. "There is another humungus vase of fresh flowers on the bedroom dresser along with an expensive bottle of champagne and equally pricey box of imported chocolates. There is only one king sized bed with a heart shaped head board. Last, but not least, the white duvet has fresh flower peddles scattered on it." She finished.

Skonn briefly frowned and blinked uncomprehendingly.

"Skonn, this is the honeymoon suite!" Janice exclaimed. She immediately regretted her outburst because the poor man briefly blushed green.

"Forgive me. I was not made aware of what kind of room this was, merely that it was the only one available," Skonn said in his defense.

"I understand. Forgive me for yelling. We'll have to work something out," Janice said as she pinched the bridge of her nose with her right hand. This was not the time for one of her infamous migraine headaches to strike.

"I will sleep in the living room, you can have the bedroom," Skonn suggested.

"Wanna share the chocolates and champagne?" Janice asked, teasingly.

"Later perhaps. Remember, we must pick up our competition credentials." Skonn replied.

"Spoiled sport! Alas, I must bear the brunt of more crowds and lines," Janice said, as she threw her hands up in mock frustration.

*Most illogical, Skonn thought as he righted the luggage case he'd dropped and continued unloading the anti-grav carrier.*

# Fiction

## Fallen Angel - Part 35

by Capt Wynan

"Lillian! Lillian! Where are you?" Angel called out. The fog lay thick on the ground, perfect for hiding a child or for hiding something trying to take a child. The trees stretched on endlessly and no matter how fast she ran she never seemed to get very far. From the fog a small child's voice floated through the darkness, "Momma..."

Angel sat upright in her bed roll, her hands searching the bedding next to her before her eyes were even open. "Lillian!"

Angel's eyes searched the bedding her hands were touching, looking for the small form of Lillian who should have been there. With a hand she pushed her hair out of her eyes, eyes that now searched the small camp site. Others who had been bedded down for the night began to stir sleepily.

The coals from their fire provided little light to the camp site. The myriad stars shining down on them provided more. Angel could see the sleeping forms of two of her three companions starting to rouse in response to her startled cries for Lillian.

"What's going on Angel?" Boomer asked rubbing his face.

Kroll came in from the shadows where he had been standing watch. He looked at Angel questioningly.

"Kroll, have you seen Lillian?" Angel asked.

Kroll answered her in his guttural growl.

"Surely she can't have gotten very far," Professor Pearson said as he climbed out from under his blanket.

Boomer started rounding up their supplies in order to make ready for a search. What normally would have taken him fifteen minutes took him five.

"We will find her." Boomer said reassuringly with his hand on Angel's shoulder.

"There is a pounding in my chest," Angel said. Why can't I catch my breath?"

"You, my dear, are experiencing fear. We will find her, I promise," the professor said reassuringly.

"Something is wrong, I can feel it," Angel said as they gathered up their gear and headed into the forest.

Kroll growled something to Angel.

"What did he say?" the professor asked.

"He says there is no danger on this planet of any wild animals, but there are dangerous spots. Lillian is a smart girl and we will find her," Angel translated. "He says he will take the lead."

Kroll searched the perimeter until he found a faint footprint he knew to be Lillian's. They ventured into the dark forest where the light from the stars couldn't penetrate the canopy to the ground. Still Kroll followed the footprints heading south away from camp.

Just as in her dream, fog started to seep its way up from the ground pocketing in low lying areas and moving eerily among the open spaces between the low lying bushes. Her eyes scanned the darkness hoping to see Lillian's little form materialize out of the darkness. The trees and low lying bushes reached out, grabbing her hair and tug-

ging at her clothes. She called out to Lillian every few steps, her ears straining to pick up any sound that might mean they had found her.

Kroll continued through the dense undergrowth on a trail that only he could see. Angel, Boomer and the professor tried to see the footprints but could not. Parts of the ground were still spongy from the flooding that occurred months earlier, pulling at everyone's feet.

Boomer wandered from side to side along the trail Kroll was following to call out to the little girl and then listened. Professor Pearson held Angel's hand as she struggled through the mud and undergrowth, tears now freely streaming down her face. "Lillian!" she called out desperately. "We have been out here for hours! Why isn't the sun coming up?" Angel looked around for any hint of light beginning to appear above the eastern skyline. The darkness of the trees made it nearly impossible to tell which direction was which but, luckily, the old adage of moss growing on the north side of the trees proved to be an interplanetary one.

Kroll spoke, his head still focused on the ground in front of him.

"What did he say?" the professor asked.

"He says it will be another hour before the sun comes up," Angel said forlornly. It felt as if they had been walking for hours through the darkness searching, calling for Lillian. How could she have just disappeared? Thoughts of never finding her chased around in her mind. She tried to keep them at bay, refusing to accept that outcome. The dream had seemed so real and it felt as if she were still in it, subconscious visions of thick fog and darkness with her little girl lost somewhere in it. The fear ate savagely at her courage and determination, leaving her a husk of a woman, frightened, ready to splinter into a million pieces if the worst came to be.

"Be strong Angel, children have been known to wander off from time to time. I'm sure we will find her very soon," the professor said, putting his arm around her shoulders again and giving her a gentle squeeze of reassurance.

"I don't know if I can survive this human form. At least when I was a part of the ship I could detect where everyone was and I could do something! I feel so terribly helpless and incapable now," Angel said softly, ashamed of how she felt even as she said it.

Kroll pushed on through the undergrowth, then stopped abruptly, causing the professor and Angel to bump into him from behind. Thankfully, his large size and strength kept him from tumbling into the darkness in front of them.

"Why did you stop?" the professor asked.

"What's going on?" Boomer asked as he came over to where they now stood.

Kroll gave a guttural response.

Angel spoke for him. "Kroll says there is a crevice here and he doesn't know how deep it is. We need to wait for daylight before we proceed any further."

"But surely, Lillian's tracks lead away from it," Boomer said

Kroll pointed down into the darkness. His action spoke for him. Angel crumpled to the ground, her legs no longer able to support her.

"Lillian!" Angel called out as her hand searched the edge of the abyss. "Where are you?"

# Brain Benders

## ACROSS

1. Haughty one
5. Be off base
8. \*Millionaire whose parents were murdered by criminals (with 72A)
13. Author \_\_\_ Ingalls Wilder
15. St. Anthony's cross
16. Aired again
17. Indian state
18. Store convenience, for short
19. Haven
20. \*25D incognito
22. \*8A incognito
24. African grazer
25. "Toccatà in Fugue in D Minor" composer
26. Airbus A380, e.g.
29. Paella pot
31. Past, present and future
36. Egg
38. Rabbit \_\_\_
40. Coarse
41. Curly cabbage
42. \*Faithful partner of 22A
44. Star in Lyra
45. Blue-pencils
47. Rani's wrap
48. Comic Sandler
49. Echo
51. Medical advice, often
53. "\_\_\_ he drove out of sight..."
54. Actress Perlman
56. Common Maket inits.

58. \*Commissioner of the Gotham City Police Department (see 25D)
61. \*Hint man (with "the")
65. Hawaiian veranda
66. Amazement
68. Herded
69. Tuckered out
70. Atlantic catch
71. Bumpkin
72. \*See 8A
73. Unduly
74. Like a bog



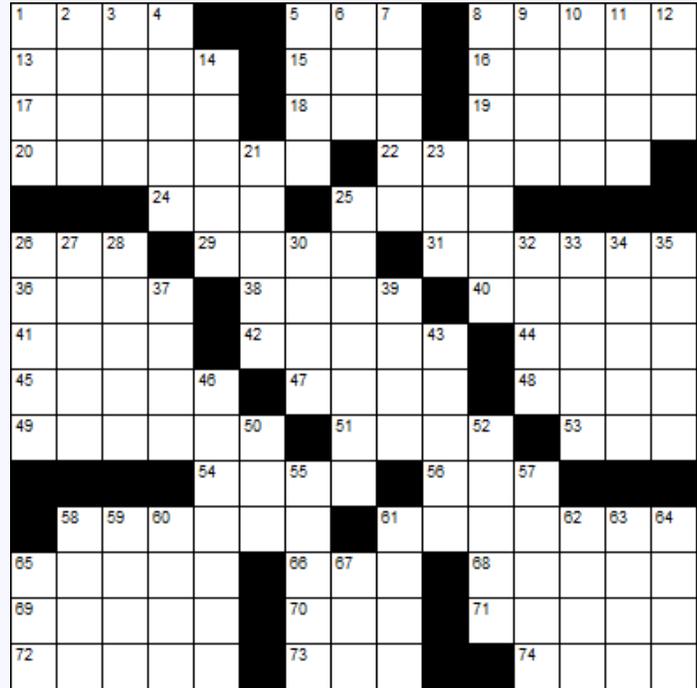
## DOWN

1. Concrete section
2. Discovery grp.
3. Depose
4. Fort \_\_\_, North Carolina
5. And others, for short
6. Scoundrel
7. Cuban dance
8. Monk
9. Enlarge, as a hole
10. \_\_\_ Major (constellation)
11. Genesis son
12. Starfleet Academy grad.
14. Kind of acid
21. King or queen
23. Pretense
25. \*Daughter of the Commissioner of the Gotham City Police Department (with 58A)
26. \*Wit man (with "the")
27. Duck
28. Garden bulb
30. Neighbor of Cambodia
32. Stellar phenomenon
33. Glove material
34. Actress Samantha
35. \*Outlaw whose trademark is a white Stetson hat and trusty six shooters
37. Allocate, with "out"
39. "Your majesty"
43. Japanese-American
46. Fish in a can
50. Even if, briefly
52. Lingerie item
55. Legislate
57. Storage medium
58. Big bash
59. Just
60. Parade spoiler
61. Decorate anew
62. Trickster in Norse mythology
63. "Did you \_\_\_?"
64. Count (on)
65. Police, with "the"
67. Go a-courting

## ESB Crockett's Spirited Crossword Puzzle

\*TV Super Hero with a Pal and a Hot Car, '66 - '68

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa - December 2016



## Answers to Previous Puzzle

C	L	A	R	K	E	B	E	N	H	A	J	J	
R	A	D	I	I	L	Y	R	E	E	T	U	I	
U	N	I	O	N	K	E	N	T	N	O	R	M	
D	D	T	G	A	S	S	S	T	N	O	M		
			A	S	P				A	P	E	R	Y
L	O	I	S	T	A	J	N	O	R				
A	R	C	H		C	O	L	T	O	U	R	S	
W	E	E		S	A	R	A	H		L	E	A	
N	O	D	E	P	I	E	D		U	N	I	T	
			K	E	Y	L	S	T	L	A	N	E	
O	R	I	E	L				N	U	T			
L	E	D		F	I	R	A	T	M	S	P	A	
S	E	L	F		T	H	O	U	I	C	E	A	X
E	V	E	R		L	E	E	R	A	P	A	C	E
N	E	R	O		L	A	R	A	K	A	L	E	L



# More Brain Benders

## SUDOKU PUZZLE

December 2016  
Hard Symmetrical  
by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

9					2	4		
							7	2
			8		6		5	
5		6						4
	9		4		7		1	
1						9		8
	2		1		3			
6	1							
		8	5					7

Solution to November's Sudoku Puzzle  
Medium Symmetrical

1	3	2	4	9	8	6	5	7
7	5	8	2	1	6	4	9	3
9	6	4	3	5	7	1	2	8
8	4	1	5	2	9	3	7	6
2	9	6	1	7	3	5	8	4
3	7	5	6	8	4	2	1	9
5	8	3	7	6	2	9	4	1
4	1	9	8	3	5	7	6	2
6	2	7	9	4	1	8	3	5

## WORD SEARCH

Dec.'s Topic: Adam West Roles  
Look for 29 character names  
by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

B	M	C	T	C	P	H	E	K	J	E	N	S	O	N
Y	R	A	W	M	C	R	T	M	E	D	A	V	I	D
B	T	R	V	T	I	A	E	B	R	R	B	L	C	O
R	U	L	I	Q	B	D	A	S	J	H	M	R	F	S
U	R	M	C	N	L	K	O	S	C	A	Y	I	S	T
C	N	C	A	O	C	M	E	T	O	O	Y	D	T	C
E	E	M	R	U	F	L	R	L	B	D	T	E	E	H
W	R	A	H	L	U	E	D	G	I	A	R	T	V	C
A	H	N	Q	C	B	K	N	E	R	R	T	C	E	L
Y	C	N	R	H	C	P	U	W	A	E	P	M	D	E
N	T	E	F	E	M	O	R	G	A	N	E	Z	A	A
E	H	G	B	S	X	S	M	V	T	Y	P	R	C	N
E	M	M	E	T	T	A	D	O	G	Z	E	R	O	D
H	I	L	L	E	S	A	M	L	O	O	M	I	S	E
J	J	E	R	R	Y	B	O	U	N	D	S	F	V	R

Solution to November's Word Search:  
George Reeves Roles

H	A	R	O	L	D	B	I	L	L	R	E	E	D	S
S	A	N	C	H	O	R	D	W	G	Y	D	P	U	U
G	S	J	M	L	L	U	O	Y	A	B	W	I	E	R
I	U	O	F	A	I	C	N	B	R	Z	I	L	H	V
Y	P	H	B	M	N	E	R	E	Y	T	L	O	H	E
W	E	N	O	X	B	E	I	N	L	O	L	T	L	Y
I	R	C	B	M	R	D	C	S	E	S	I	G	C	O
L	M	A	W	G	A	W	H	O	E	M	A	T	L	R
S	A	R	I	D	D	A	I	N	S	N	M	E	A	N
O	N	T	L	Z	L	R	E	T	T	M	S	M	R	S
N	L	E	L	U	E	D	L	R	F	R	A	N	K	G
E	O	R	A	Y	Y	S	A	M	S	T	O	A	K	S
F	A	R	R	B	O	U	L	D	E	R	Y	M	E	P
A	U	G	D	H	T	O	M	S	M	I	T	H	N	F
V	Y	J	E	S	S	E	J	A	M	E	S	B	T	L

# Brain Benders

## Word Search

### December's Word List:

Batman	Jenson
Bert	Jerry Bounds
Bruce Wayne	Jim Beck
Carl McMann	Kermit
Chester	Manbat
Cleander	Mitch
David	Morgan
Dog Zero	Mr. Greer
Emmett	Mr. Hyde
Fenway	Mr. Turner
Harold	Prescott
Hercules	Sam Garrett
Hill	Sam Loomis
Huckabee	Steve Daco
Jay	



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