



Crockett's Spirit

Impavidus Scribere Veritas — The Brave Write the Truth



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From Risa's Casino Andoria to all at E,SB...



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Fiction

Food for Thought

by Brig. Gen. Drego Tensa

It felt as if he were being stung by thousands of tiny mosquitos. When the Chief Physician looked down at his arm, he saw nothing. But the pain was still there. He quickly took out a hypo and injected an antihistamine into his bloodstream. Just then, the rest of the landing party started feeling it, so Dr. Benjamin Carr hurriedly injected them. His medscan readings showed nothing unusual. Then he said, "Away mission's over!" We're beaming back to the ship until I can get a fix on this, and then fix it!" He then activated his mincom, "Carr to Ranger! We have a medical problem!"

"Crane here, do you have an emergency?"

"No, Commander. At least not yet. But I want all five of us teleported directly to the Infirmary and once we're on board, I want a level ten force field placed around it. I'll fill you in later."

"Consider it done, Doc!"

Carr turned to the others and said, "I need you to bring whatever samples you gathered with you."

Once in the Infirmary, Carr asked, "How's the pain?" He already knew the answer.

Zoologist Karen Ziegler answered first, "It's only in the arms and legs, but it really hurts, Doc!" The others said much the same. Botanist Carl Stakely said "Ben, I think it's getting worse." Carr looked at the others quizzically. They shook their heads.

"I'm going to take blood and skin cell samples," the doctor said. He then drew blood from the four, from himself, and he followed by taking skin scrapings.

"Now, who brought what from the planet?"

Zoologist Karen Ziegler responded, "I brought some very nice vid-recs of animal tracks I'd never seen before."

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Geologist Andros Petrov said, "I picked up a few good mineral samples, but nothing exotic."

Geoffrey Knowles said that his archeological search was fruitless. "I found no signs of civilized habitation whatsoever, Doctor, so I brought nothing back."

Botanist Carl Stakely, starting to grimace from the worsening pain, said that he had uprooted and potted half a dozen unique looking plant specimens and pointed to them.

"Understood. Any ideas before I get started?" the chief physician asked the group. Shrugs and shaken heads were the only responses he received. "Very well," he said.

Dr. Carr turned and stepped into the adjoining room, a medical lab, small, yet laden with state of the art diagnostic equipment and research facilities. He examined the minerals visually first, looking closely at every square millimeter of each with a magnifier. Nothing appeared out of the ordinary. He chipped several tiny fragments from each pebble sized sample, then set the minerals aside. He then began looking over each plant. The plants were either sumac, fern or ivy. All were lush green. None had flowers or seed pods. They were cool to the touch. They exhibited nothing unusual. As carefully as he could, he took cell scrapings from the leaves and stalks of each plant. Then, he prepared a number of sterile vials and placed into each a minute portion of the blood, skin-cell, mineral, plant-leaf and plant-stem samples. He placed the vials into receptacles inside the *particle analyze*, and turned it on. "Well now, let's see what secrets you can reveal to us," he mused aloud.

Dr. Carr was about to go to his desk and await the results of the analysis when he noticed that the pain had begun to reassert itself. He looked again at the mineral samples. There was nothing different about them. When he touched the plants, he noticed that one of them was warmer to the touch than it had been earlier. *I wonder*, he thought. He spoke into his mincom, "Carr to Minara."

"Minara here," a feminine voice with a barely noticeable accent responded. "What can I do for you, Doctor?"

"Can you come to the med lab please? I need to take advantage of your special expertise."

"I'll be right there."

Petite, telepathic Doctor of Science Valea Minara, originally from the planet Danar, walked into the med lab a few minutes later. Good evening, Ben. What exactly do you need?

"Hello, Valea. I need to get your...sense...of something. I have a hunch...I just need your confirmation."

Valea walked around the lab briefly, stopping near the plant samples. "I see what you mean, Ben.

Your intuition is correct."

"Thank you, Valea. I owe you one."

Valea Minara left the lab just as the particle analyzer's chime sounded. Dr. Carr looked over the data in its readout. *That explains a lot*, he thought to himself. *The P.A. always comes through*.

Returning to the infirmary, Dr. Carr once again addressed the group. The pain, he said, is caused by a simple molecule that enters the bloodstream through the skin and clamps itself onto a pain generating nerve. Its size makes it extremely difficult to detect and nearly impossible to combat. It's harder to cure than a virus. These molecules are a defense mechanism of one or more of the plant species. When pestered by an animal...or, in our case, a human, the plant emits the molecules which attack the pest. And it appears," he told Stakely, "that you are still being attacked. To be on the safe side, we are returning all plants and minerals to the surface. The Minerals are probably benign, but we're not taking any chances. Carl, I'll be taking your notes. You're in no condition to go anywhere."

Dr. Carr and Andros Petrov returned to the planet's surface. Petrov returned each mineral to the exact spot where he had found it. Dr. Carr, using Stakely's notes, replanted every floral specimen in its original location. The two then returned to the ship.

Mission Commander Crane, Dr. Carr and the other away team members met for a debriefing an hour later. All symptoms of pain had vanished. Dr. Carr informed the mission commander and the others as to what had occurred. Then he added, "Theo, I believe, and Dr. Minara agrees with me, that the plant that fires the molecules also communicates with them remotely. Once the plants were returned to their habitat, the molecules released their grip...but not until then."

Theo Crane cocked an eyebrow, "Telepathic plants? Hardly seems possible, and doesn't seem at all believable. Nevertheless, Doctor, your findings do give credence to the idea. I daresay it's an interesting concept and it certainly warrants further study. Let's look into it further...carefully!"

A Nugget by CDRE Logan Kale

Did you know that.. In the TNG episode "Half a Life" Dr. Timicin (David Ogden Stiers, who played "Winchester" on M*A*S*H) is forced to cut his research short to return to his homeworld to commit ritual suicide. While doing his research, however, we can clearly see that the computer workstation he is using in Engineering (visible in the upper right hand corner) is terminal #4077!

*Source: Top Secret

New Talent Fiction

The Vanthean Chronicles: Tyranny's Dawn

by OC Star Eagle

Prologue

Five years ago...

A LARGE COMET made its cosmic dance toward an average-sized yellow star named Ahn. This was the same dance that it had performed millions of times over billions of years, hardly ever changing. It had slowly made its way this far from the depths of the dust ring that lay beyond all the planets of this system. As it traveled thousands of miles every second, the star's gravity had a greater and greater effect, pulling it ever closer until its elliptical orbit took it once again beyond all these worlds. Before that happened, however, something slightly different would occur. The comet would soon pass very close to a large blue gas giant planet, and near the dozens of encircling moons—and one moon in particular. This moon was full of vibrant life, a world itself alive...a world named Vanthea.

This is just what they wanted. Their journey to get here through the infinite, empty ocean of space had only taken them an instant; such was the power of pure intent. This same power allowed them to escape the bonds of their reality-prison. In fleeing the confines of their captors, though, they had exhausted most of their energy. The comet was a welcome respite from which they could restore their power before completing their journey.

They were beings composed of pure energy, these fourteen souls, with full consciousness and sentience. For eons they had been involved in a war to control the reality of their native world, a reality which had no physical form but instead was composed of dreams, thoughts, emotions and illusions. While their world was a physical planet—a huge, lifeless rock in space—it had no direct bearing upon the individual souls who resided there.

They had fought so long, so terribly hard, to control the basic nature and thought-structure of their reality through the application of pure force of will, locking thought-forms into place. Both they and their enemies would change the nature of reality to confound the plans of one another. In the end, however, they had lost the war. Their wills were not strong enough to overpower the beings who had finally confined them; their enemies were too strong and too great in number. All that these beings and their followers had wanted

was to create and perfect a reality that would never change—except by their wills alone.

Then, quite by accident, the stranger appeared to them, calling himself a wizard. He told them that, though he was appearing to them as a spirit, the reality he came from was based on physical laws and physical forms. This concept intrigued the fourteen, and they asked him where he came from. He told them that he had a beacon, which he called a spire, which could guide them to a new home. He was delighted to assist them in their efforts to leave their prison, since he desperately needed them to fulfill his own dreams of having power over life and death itself. The fourteen had no concept of physical death—or life, for that matter. They didn't care about this, though, so long as he could provide them a new place from which both parties could do as they wished. They still needed a way to get away, however.

The stranger kept visiting them periodically, masking his own energy so that those in control would not notice his essence as different from theirs, to prevent them from trying to stop or control him. He helped the fourteen begin combining their energies—and their wills—into one force, one being, so that their powers could grow exponentially. In doing this, they might have a chance to escape their captivity and their captors—beings who believed in harmony, peace and divine love—once and for all. He taught them how to focus their hatred and desire for revenge into a powerful source of energy from which they could draw strength, perhaps enough power to break free of their prison. Most importantly, though, he promised them all physical bodies with which they could fully explore a reality totally new to them. He also promised that nothing would change in this world except by their wills, through their own actions as a physical expression of their wills. At first, they agreed to this. Upon realizing how powerful they were as one entity, however, they decided instead that all fourteen of them wanted to share just one body.

They had unified, escaped their prison and then set out for a new world to conquer. Now they were here, riding this comet and following the spire closer and closer to its source. Though they were now separate beings from the strain of their arduous journey, they would soon reunite to become an immensely powerful being, one of physical form as well as energy. They would create a perfect world according to their wills, soon freeing the rest of their followers to join them in this new world, to fully explore its pleasures through cruelty, greed, lust and a myriad of other dark emotions.

To do all of this, however, would first require a lie. They knew exactly which lie they would use. Then, they would nurture that lie and grow it, adding every bit of their intentions, thoughts and emotions to it—all the hatred, vengeance and deception that they could muster, hiding their darkness behind a mask of light. They would make others believe in their false light too, manipulating just enough souls to agree with it and follow them, until finally that lie would be the truth.

Fiction

The Alfore Encounter - 40

"Strange Encounters"

by CAPT Two Wolves

Mi hijo, what will we need to pack for Vulcan?" Marisol asked Tony.

"Light summer clothing, and a few moderate fall like jackets, sweaters, pants and shoes in case you have to go out at night. I also suggest you bring along cooked food, particularly meat dishes. Vulcan's do not eat meat and since you are not a vegetarian, after two weeks you will literally kill for a hamburger or a chicken leg," Tony replied.

Marisol stared in shock at her son, then at her Daughter-In-Law. "Ay, Dios mio! No meat on the entire planet?"

"Nana, Vulcans are strict followers of Surak who advocated nonviolence and being strict vegetarians," Jessica interjected.

"You are absolutely correct, Jessica," Shara said, as she looked up from Victoria who was nestled comfortably in her handcrafted Alforian nursing sling, nursing.

"I'll call Rosa and ask her to help cook," Marisol said.

"Ay, ay, ay! She'll cook enough to feed a Roman battalion," Tony protested.

"Without decent food, we'll all starve," Marisol lamented.

"Mom, I merely said Vulcan's are vegetarians. I didn't say their food is inedible," Tony responded.

"I'll agree to try it, but I want to have a backup, just in case," Marisol insisted. "How long will we be there?"

"Anywhere from three to six months," Shara replied.

"Ay, Dios mio! Six months? What kind of trial will it be, one for multiple murder?" Marisol quizzed. She had no clue as to how close to the truth she was. Shara and Tony kept their expressions blank.

"I'll have to get permission from Jessica's principal and teachers! An entire semester she will miss!" Marisol despaired.

"Momma, you said you wanted to go to Vulcan. You can back out now if you want. No one will hold it against you if you don't go," Tony told her. All eyes in the room were on Marisol, even Victoria's.

"No, mi hijo, I made a promise. I have to keep it. I may never get off planet again in this life," was Marisol's determined reply.

Back on Azo, Skonn and Janice once again navigated through the crowded hotel lobby and out into the street. Janice immediately put her right hand up to shield her eyes from the bright sunlight.

Blast! I forgot my sunglasses! she thought as they made their way across a wide, busy pedestrian plaza. As they entered a harshly lit walkway, she ducked her head like a vampire avoiding the sun.

Siiva Stadium where the events were to be held was hard to miss. It was an enormous glass-domed structure which looked as if it were made from delicately woven glass filigree, but Janice knew better. Apparently, the Azo were experts at building unique and aesthetically pleasing structures which were entirely lit during the day by the strong Azotan sun.

They entered by way of a side entrance and queued up in a short line. Five minutes later, they were standing at the counter. Skonn presented a comtab which contained his credentials. The Azo male scanned the code into his computer and handed him an old press-pass-like card with his photo and biometric eye-scan info on it. It also came with a lanyard for hanging it from his neck. As Skonn's guest, Janice was instructed to stand in front of a holo photo imager. Minutes later, Janice also had her identification. Next, the Azo asked for their clothing and shoe sizes, and then stepped away.

"Why'd he ask for that?" Janice asked.

"As you humans are fond of saying, promotional goodies," Skonn replied. The Azo was back with cello-wrapped packages for each of them. Everything was then placed into brightly colored Intergalactic Kempo Karate Federation shopping bags and given to them. Skonn and Janice thanked the man, and then both headed back out toward the plaza.

"What in the world did he give us?" Janice asked. She pawed through her bag, momentarily distracted. Just then, someone slammed into her right side nearly knocking her to the ground. Skonn quickly grabbed her left arm and kept her from falling. Someone else attempted to grab Janice by the throat and the fight was on.

Janice throat-punched two attackers as Skonn went into full karate mode knocking the rest down for the count like tenpins. Shrill whistles heralded the approach of local law enforcement officials.

One of Skonn's attackers charged at him, batleth in hand. Echo flew out of his vest pocket straight at the attacker, spitting fire all the way. As Janice floored yet another attacker, braking his arm, she was nearly deafened by nonhuman shrieks of agony.

Echo has excellent aim, she thought, as they became surrounded by law enforcement officers who were busy arresting the fallen attackers, whom

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Janice noted were Klingons.

"I am Captain Gos of Azotan Enforcement Central," a well-muscled Azo male introduced himself to the couple. "Can you explain what happened?" He was dressed in an immaculate khaki uniform, black combat boots and wore a belt arrayed with an impressive assortment of arms and accessories.

Skonn recounted the incident blow by blow while Janice picked up their scattered belongings with the help of a female Azo officer.

"I will need you both to come to our outpost for further questioning," Captain Gos said. That was the last thing Janice wanted. However, they both agreed and were escorted to a marked police transport vehicle. They got into the back seat, the captain got into the front passenger seat, the female Azo officer got into the driver's seat. The Captain instructed her to take them to the outpost. The transport lifted off and zipped towards its destination.

Five minutes later, they landed in front of the outpost. Unlike the previous structures Janice had seen, this building looked exactly as it was supposed to, an armored encampment that law enforcement worked out of. There were two entrances, one for civilians, the other for prisoners.

The captain waited until some arrestees were taken in via the prisoner entrance, then he let Skonn and Janice out of the transport and led them in.

Janice looked around fascinated by the clean, efficient looking offices, and by the many uniformed Azo personnel.

This way, sir, madame," Captain Gos said as he escorted them into his office. There were two Azo sitting in his office, one male, one female, dressed in the Azo version of business suits. Without being introduced to them, Janice knew instinctively that they were detectives. Both had that "look" about them.

"First, I need to see some form of identification." Captain Gos said. Both Skonn and Janice activated and handed over their comtabs. The Captain gazed at each and raised nonexistent eyebrows.

"Starfleet?" Gos queried, impressed.

"Affirmative," Skonn answered.

"Captain. Commander, what is your purpose for visiting our planet?"

"I am attending and judging the The Intergalactic Kempo Karate Championship. Captain Darden who is also my commanding officer, is my guest," Skonn replied.

"Both of you are on official leave from your Starfleet duties, are you not?" Gos asked as he handed the devices back.

No, we're both AWOL and we decided this would

be a nice place to hang out, Janice thought, testily. "My ship, The U.S.S. Nicola Tesla is currently at Space Dock 17 and being refitted which typically takes up to six weeks, so yes, I and my crew are on official leave," Janice replied instead.

"Please describe the events which led up to the incident again," Captain Gos, continued. Again, Skonn gave him a blow by blow description of the events. Janice watched Gos interview Skonn while the two detectives took notes on their tablets.

"Commander Skonn, do you have the proper licenses for your Fryin Dragon?" Gos asked.

"Affirmative," Skonn replied. He swiped his comtab and handed it over.

"Impressive! From the Fryin Ruling House and Monarch herself," Gos said.

"Yes. My father, Ambassador Solan, brokered a treaty between the Ruling House Hoytava and the House Avoll, who had been bitter enemies for decades. A mated pair of Fryin Dragons was Queen Trottanian's gift of appreciation to my father," Skonn told him.

"Did you ever meet any of your assailants in the past?" One of the detectives asked, speaking for the first time. Janice had privately elected to call him "Smith".

"Negative."

"No."

"So, you are saying this was an unprovoked attack perpetrated upon you by complete strangers?" queried the female detective whom Janice had dubbed "Jones".

"Yes", Janice said. "One of them slammed into me, nearly knocking me flat. When Skonn reached out to prevent me from falling, they attacked us both."

"Even though you stated that you did not know your attackers, I want you to have a look at this line up," Smith said and handed his tablet to Skonn. "Swipe left to see the next image."

Skonn swiped as Janice looked over his right shoulder. None of the Klingon mug shots were recognizable to her.

"I counted six, but, I recall there were seven." Skonn said, as handed the tablet back.

"Yes, that one succumbed to his burn injuries. There is no great loss as he was wanted by the Klingon Empire for having escaped from Rura Penthe," Jones explained.

"No one escapes from Rura Penthe, alive that is," Janice remarked.

"Not so. Captain James T. Kirk and Doctor Leonard McCoy did," Skonn corrected.

Oy! How the heck could I have forgotten that? Janice thought.

"The aforementioned escaped with the assis-

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tance of Commander Spock and the Enterprise. How did this Klingon, escape?" Skonn queried.

"Klingon authorities still do not know, however, it is believed he also had outside assistance," Captain Gos replied. "Additionally, he slaughtered twenty five prisoners in doing so. Your dragon did the universe a service by removing him from this mortal coil. The rest of his compatriots will be extradited to Klinzhi where they will executed for their crimes."

"Executed?" Skonn asked. "That form of punishment is only reserved for captiol offenses, treason or terrorism."

"Yes, they've been linked to an intergalactic terrorist organization which is responsible for many innocent Klingon deaths," Gos explained. "Does the name 'Shining Path' ring a bell?"

Oh my God! Janice thought.

"No, it does not," Skonn lied skillfully. That information was supposed to be classified, and he wasn't about to let on as to what he knew.

"In light of the recent incident, I'm issuing both of you temporary licenses to carry phasers during your stay on our planet. If you need us, please call us immediately. This interview is officially over. Thank you for your cooperation and have a meaningful stay." Gos offered. Skonn and Janice thanked him and the others, then left hurriedly.

"Skonn, did you recognize any of those Klingon mug shots?" Janice whispered, as they got into an air taxi.

"Affirmative. Two of them attempted to get into The Kitchen Sink, back on Earth. Three were traveling on Captain Jaclyn McFarland's ship," Skonn told her.

"What would The Shining Path want with us, or me?" Janice asked.

"I do not know." Skonn lied again.

"You're full of crap, Skonn. There's something you're not telling me, and I aim to find out what that is even if I have to die trying," Janice threatened.

You picked an unfortunate way of phrasing that, Captain, Skonn thought as he stared straight ahead.

"What the..." Janice shouted. "He passed the hotel!"

Without a word, Skonn levered himself up by grabbing the passenger assist bar and used both booted feet to kick through the partition which separated them from the driver, knocking him insensate. The hover car's AI automatically activated the dead man's device and brought the car down, landing it with a slight thump. The door locks were deactivated and Skonn and Jancie piled out. Skonn went to the driver's door and opened it.

"I have undesirable news on two fronts," Skonn announced after examining the driver.

"Out with it, Skonn!"

"The driver has died of his injuries, and he was a Romulan in disguise," Skonn informed her.

To be continued...

Fiction

Fallen Angel - Part 36

by Capt Wynan

Lillian awoke to find herself still clinging to the log in front of her while the rest of her body was still mired in quicksand. The cool night air left her shivering as her hands grew numb from the cold water sitting on top of the gritty dirt and sand into which the log had partially sunk. She could barely make out its bark in front of her, let alone anything else around her. The darkness pressed in on her. She felt as if it were trying to push her down into the quicksand, trying to bury her.

How did she get here? Why is she so cold and wet? Where was she? Slowly it came back to her, she had found the crystals glowing at night and had followed their trail into the woods. The night felt warm and inviting, not at all dangerous. A thought had briefly crossed her mind to let Boomer or Momma know, but she quickly dismissed the idea. Surely she would be back before they even knew she was gone. The soft glowing pieces of crystal had seemed to call to her as she walked deeper into the forest. She followed the trail until she saw a softly glowing crystal somewhat below where she had been walking. She stood there on the edge of a ravine, looking down at the crystal. Her backpack had grown heavy with the pieces she had collected so far. Using several of the softly glowing pieces of crystal she held them close to the ground to light her way as she carefully picked her way down the side of the gully until she was near the stream. The water reflected the light from the crystals, helping to illuminate the area. Lillian could see it was only a thin layer on top of the ground and felt it was safe to step out into it. She had only taken a couple of steps though before she realized she was in trouble. Her feet were quickly sinking into the ground and soon she found she couldn't move her feet any more. The heavy bag of crystals she had held onto so dearly a moment ago she now threw away from her, hoping to lighten her weight to stop the sinking. The slurry of mud and sand slowed its creep up her body but was still inching slowly upwards. Lillian remembered the professor telling her that struggling in quicksand was the worst thing she could do and that many quicksand pits were not very deep. This one however seemed not to have a bottom. Reaching out her hands in the darkness she felt around trying to find something to grab onto. The glowing crystals she had collected disappeared as the back pack which held them sank into the darkness of the quicksand. The muck had reached her waist by the time she felt the wood of the fallen tree. It wasn't very big around, about the size of her small waist but when she tried to pull herself onto it, it too started to sink.

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She lay the upper portion of her body across the log and held still. She remembered the Professor telling her that movement only makes you sink faster. She found that with her upper torso across the log she stopped sinking. Lillian held still, trying to remain calm but the darkness that had once seemed so friendly now felt threatening and oppressive. The night sounds that had comforted her before now frightened her. She tried calling out but soon quieted knowing that her people were nowhere near to hear her.

Surely they would have noticed my being gone by now, she thought desperately to herself.

Then, a worse thought came to her; what if they wouldn't notice until morning. The idea of being trapped here for hours and hours chilled her already shivering body even more. The water had soaked her clothes, and even though it was a comfortable night for someone in dry clothes, the wetness chilled her. Exhaustion was setting in and she soon drifted off into a fitful sleep, dreaming of things reaching for her in the darkness. She awoke with a start, looking around frantically for the clawed hand she had seen in her nightmare.

From above her she heard a sound of something moving through the brush. Panic crept up her spine as she held her breath trying to peer through the darkness.

"Lillian, where are you!" came Angel's voice from above.

Relief flooded through her as she recognized her voice and those of Boomer and Kroll as well. Weakly she tried to call out to them but found her voice had deserted her. So she pulled in a lung full of air and called tried again, calling out with everything she had,

"Momma," came out weak but those above heard her.

"Here, use this to ignite the pitch," Professor Pearson said.

Soon the gully Lillian was in became flare-lit and she saw the faces of the professor, Angel, Boomer and Kroll peering down over the edge of the ravine.

Tears streamed down her face when she saw her Momma-Angel looking down at her with tired eyes and a warm smile. Boomer was first to start picking his way down to *his* little girl.

"Daddy, be careful! I'm in quicksand and I can't get out!" she cried out, fearing he would become ensnared in the muck.

"Boomer, grab that branch over there on the side and hold it out for her to grab," the professor said holding the torch up high to better light the area as Kroll and Angel gingerly made their way down.

Boomer picked up the slender green branch and held it out for Lillian to grab. Her hands were cold and numb, though she could touch the branch held out to her, she just didn't have the strength to grip it and hold on.

Kroll's guttural growl caused Lillian to turn towards his large looming figure as he stood next to Boomer on the edge of the quicksand.

"Kroll, there is a vine over your head!" the professor said pointing.

Angel translated what Professor Pearson had said and also said to Boomer, "Hang on, Kroll is going to lift you out to her!"

Boomer barely had time to drop the branch before Kroll picked him up one-handed by the waist of his pants, while his other hand took hold the heavy vine hanging down just low enough for him to grab. Boomer reached for Lillian's outstretched hands and gently pulled her out of the muck. Boomer strained to hold on to her without hurting her. Kroll groaned under the strain of holding the weight of Boomer and the added weight of the sodden Lillian as well. Finally Lillian's feet slipped free of the muck and she was carried over and set gently on the ground next to Kroll. Angel wrapped her arms around her crying softly, stroking her damp hair, brushing it out of her face. Boomer sat down next to the two, taking off his shirt to cover Lillian with. Lillian's body was shaking violently as she sobbed into Angel's shoulder.

"She is frozen. We need to get her out of here and warm her up," Boomer said.

Kroll picked up both Angel and Lillian and sat them on the bank above his head where Professor Pearson stood with the torch. Boomer scrambled up next to them and started clearing a small area where he could build a camp fire to warm the child. Kroll climbed up next and brought with him some dead wood that had lain scattered along the edge of the bank. Angel dug into her backpack and brought out a large shirt for Lillian to change into. Boomer took her wet things and draped them over some bushes to dry. The sun was just starting to appear over the horizon as Angel wrapped Lillian in a blanket, holding her in her lap and rubbing her arms to help get her circulation flowing again.

"Lillian, you can spew flames. Why didn't you just start a small fire down there?" Boomer asked as he finally sat down next to Angel and the small child.

"I thought about it, but I worried the log I was hanging on was the only wood around me and might burn me," she said as she cuddled into Angel's lap. Yawning widely, she closed her eyes and promptly fell asleep.

"I think we will have to wait a day or two before we go any further," Professor Pearson said as he took out his bedroll and sat down upon it. Kroll and Boomer used their blankets to wrap around the two who were curled up on Angel's bedding. Angel had fallen asleep not long after Lillian. Boomer had thought to put Lillian on her own bed but soon found that Angel's arms were firmly wrapped around the child even though she slept soundly.

"We will have a talk with the young lady, but I think we should all get something to eat and rest," the professor said to the two exhausted men sitting around the fire. He broke out some bread and fruit and passed it to both men who chewed it wearily. Finally, having finished their small breakfast, they stretched out on the ground letting the rising sun warm their bodies. The professor sat quietly, relieved that Lillian was safe and seemed to be alright. He had wondered how much of his teachings the child had really heard, but now he knew. With a contented sigh he looked up towards the sky as a single tear slid down his cheek.

Fiction

Star Wars - Ashi's Shame

Chapter 5: Right Choices

by LTJG Ashinaga

Against their master's wishes, the teenaged trainees of Master Binjin's school had already begun to spar with one another. Little Ashi kept working with the training statue, scared of the bigger boys who were beating on each other.

"Hey! What about the runt?" a boy yelled out.

Several of the guys stopped their sparring and came over to Ashi. He tried to ignore them, but they were getting closer.

The guys were old enough to have half of their manes already, which was about the age when they used their hormones to think with instead of their brains. One reached out and caught the small staff that Ashi was swinging and pulled it right of his hands.

"Hey! That's mine!" Ashi jumped up after his staff but wasn't tall enough to reach it.

The boy who took the staff shoved him over. "Don't you know that age means rank in this school? I've been training for six years. You don't talk back to me like that."

Ashi snarled at him with his tiny fangs. They laughed at this, which made him all the angrier.

"Ooh, better give it back to him. He might bite," another boy stated mockingly.

"Alright." He tossed the staff back to the child, "How about showing me why Master is suddenly so happy with you. You're supposed to be so good after only one week." He pushed Ashi into the sparring circle and picked up a full sized staff.

Ashi was so scared he just closed up and held his arms against himself. He wanted Master Binjin to get back here right now and stop this. Suddenly there came a sharp sting against his shoulder and he looked to see that the boy had hit him, not too hard, but enough to hurt.

"Come on, cub, fight! I'm not letting you go until you fight back." He swung again and hit Ashi's other shoulder. "Come on!"

* * * * *

Binjin and Yoda arrived at the back of the school to see this impromptu sparring match. He watched the boy hit Ashi on the shoulder once more. Then the teenager went for Ashi's head. Ashi managed to deflect this strike. Ashi stumbled and looked scared, but he executed the deflection just right. A second time he did this and kept himself out of harm's way.

He did not lash out at the brash older boy, only protected himself.

The older boy got mad, as did his best friend. Now two older boys were swinging at Ashi. He deflected two blows and then dropped to the ground to dodge another. Ashi found himself curled up in a ball, scared out of his wits.

Now the two older boys were going to give Ashi something to be scared of. He was actually good and that made them furious. He was supposed to be pathetic. They both swung down but found their staffs frozen in place, inches from Ashi's quivering little body. They were also frozen in place, unable to move.

Yoda had an outstretched hand and closed eyes, "Behave with honor, you do not. Fight one your own size, you should." He chortled at this. "Retrieve the youngling, you should," Yoda commanded Binjin.

Binjin took the cue and marched over to his students. He picked up the terrified little Ashi and set him back on his feet. Yoda released the two boys and they struck the ground with the same energy they were about to expend mauling a five-year-old child.

Binjin turned around and yelled, "Heska! Yorin! Inside, now!"

The older boys ran for the school house, now terrified themselves.

Binjin unfurled the curled up Ashi and looked into his trembling face, "It's okay, Ashi. It's okay. They aren't going to hurt you. They're in a lot of trouble."

Ashi cried, "I didn't spar, I promise. They made me."

Binjin smiled and checked him over, "Don't cry, don't cry. I know. You're not in trouble."

"I'm...not?" Ashi sniffed.

Yoda walked over with a very kind smile, "A good boy, you are. Listen to your master, you do."

Ashi nodded quickly, "I tried."

"Try, you did not. succeed, you did. Very good. Come into village. Something sweet, we'll have." Yoda looked up to Binjin who got the hint.

"Yes. Let's go have some sweet koffa berries and cream." He turned to the others, all scared of their master right now. "The rest of you, get inside and clean this school until I don't see sheddings on anything. Thalla, tell Heska and Yorin to wait in the testing room until I get back." Everyone was guilty of not stopping this terrible action, they would all be punished. But, the two who actually attacked Ashi were going to be very unhappy.

Ashi, who was nearly as tall as Yoda, walked next to the Jedi master. The boy was now all questions. Yoda, who spent a lot of his time working with younglings at the temple, was very good with children.

* * * * *

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

A month passed and another Republic ship arrived, this one bigger than the first. They brought more medical supplies and other aid that was needed in this time of crisis for the Jahalans. The senatorial representative now had three other representatives from the Jedi council, led by Master Yoda again.

Little Ashi was unaware of the five hours of discussion between the Jedi Masters and the Chief. Binjin was also there as the closest person to a family that Ashi had. Ashi finished training with one of the lower instructors when Binjin calmly walked up to him in the training yard.

"Ashi, please come with me."

Ashi never realized that the reason he seemed to understand what people were feeling was his own innate talent with the force. Right now he could sense the sadness in his master, but the look on Binjin's face was anything but concern. Ashi handed the small training staff to the instructor and then took Binjin's hand to follow him through town.

They entered the council hall of the Jahalan's and found the three Jedi seated with the village chief. Ashi was as nervous as any five year old would be with everyone looking at him. In his mind, he worried that he had done something wrong and was in trouble. He saw the little green man that had been so nice to him a month ago. Yoda was smiling, and this made Ashi feel somewhat better.

"Bring the child to the middle of the room please," Master Windu stated.

Binjin brought Ashi to the middle of the gathering and then stopped with him. Ashi clutched Binjin's leg, scared terribly. His left hand was squeezing Binjin's while his right was holding onto his tail out of fear.

"Stand aside, master Binjin," said Jada Nar, a very tall and thin female Jedi.

"No." Ashi held tightly to the strong hand.

Binjin knelt down, "Don't worry, I'll be right over here." He let go of the boy's hand and took a step back, leaving the poor boy alone to be scrutinized.

The three masters carefully and quietly studied the boy, each taking a moment to sense the force in him. Yoda was the first to speak, "Strong, the force is with this child."

Mace Windu nodded, "Yes. Though, he isn't as strong as some."

Jada Nar added, "He may have potential, but he truly is weak."

"Weak, he may seem," Yoda said. "His future, I sense. He will have great strength. Training he will need. Jedi training."

"I agree," Master Windu added.

Jada Nar turned her thin head toward Ashi, "Then, it is decided. The offer is extended to bring him to the temple."

Chief Nolith finally spoke. "We are not a republic world. We do not have to send him to the temple at your command."

Master Windu answered, "It is for his good and the good of the Jedi order that all children who are force sensitive be trained in the ways of the force."

Yoda interceded, "Correct, chief is. Jedi maintain Justice. Follow laws and order, justice is."

Chief Nolith asked, "Then what do you propose? Was the second shipment of medical supplies and doctors a payment for the child?"

Jada answered, "We do not barter for a life. The aid is a gift from the republic. I...I do not know what we are to decide. I defer to the eldest. Master Yoda, what precedent is there in this circumstance?" She bowed her long neck to the tiny master.

Yoda smiled at Ashi, he already knew what the boy was going to say. His time with them a month ago had given him enough insight to the boys thinking. "Decide, Ashi must. His choice it is. Agree, do you?" He looked at the chief.

Chief Nolith stroked his chin for a moment. "I see no reason not to allow Ashi the right to choose. Master Binjin, as his guardian, do you have anything to say?"

"I want what's best for Ashi." It hurt Binjin to say this, but it was right.

Windu extended the offer, "Ashi. We want to bring you to our planet in the Republic. You will be trained in the ways of the force. You will have all that you need."

Ashi, quivering all over, looked over to his current master. "What?"

Binjin came back to the middle of the room and knelt down to one knee. He didn't want to see Ashi leave, it would be like losing another son. But, it was for his own good and it would be a wonderful life. He put his hand on Ashi's shoulder, "Little cub, they want to take you to a special place with a lot of amazing people like them. They will teach you like I have been teaching you. You'll have a lot of other children to play with, and amazing worlds to see."

"Can I come back?" Ashi asked.

"Yes. I would want to know how you're doing." Binjin didn't know if Jedi protocol would allow Ashi to return for visits, he didn't care. If they argued, he would make it clear that this was not optional.

Ashi looked at Yoda, "Will you be there?"

"Teach you, I will. My youngling class, you will join," Yoda answered.

Ashi liked this little green man and the sense of the force in him recognized the kindness and honesty of these three people. Still nervous he said, "I'll go with you."

(Continued on page 10)

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In a matter of hours, Ashi had gathered what meager belongings he had and boarded the transport with the three masters for the long journey across space into the core of the massive republic. He gave Binjin a final hug and then took the hand of Yoda to be guided up the ramp. He was the first child ever of Jahala to be taken to the Jedi Temple.

* * * * *

Present day:

Ashi was lost in thought as he gazed into the camp fire. It seemed so long ago that he sat next to Master Yoda and watched the stars blast by as they left his home. He had no idea then what it would be like training at the temple, how different life would be. His world seemed so much smaller when he returned.

Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, he saw something dark dash by in the trees. At first, he thought it was a large bird flying through, or an animal bounding by. Then he sensed the force was stronger than basic animal life. Someone was there, watching him.

With a quick motion, he pulled one of his two swords out and held his free hand up ready to use the force. He scanned the trees around him with his eyes and his senses to find whoever was spying on him. Whatever it was, it was now gone.

It was too dark to go scouting for this stranger. Ashi needed his rest. But, he didn't need to let his guard down entirely. He sat down in front of the fire and put his swords on the ground before him. Crossing his legs, he used a special meditation technique that his master taught him. It would allow his body to be in state of rest while his mind was still awake. If he sensed anyone approaching he could wake his body and pull his weapons quickly.

* * * * *

The large village of Elbor prepared the next major shipment for this month. Situated high in the hills of the Jahalan Mountains, Elbor was the one major spaceport for the planet. The Jahalans here bartered with off-worlders for goods. They traded the produce of the planet. They dealt in grains mostly but sometimes meats as well.

A man and his young daughter pushed a cart full of milled grain ready for shipping. "Shara, make sure you keep an eye out for any hillmice, they're very active this time of year and they love this grain. Wouldn't want a shipment spoiled by infestation."

Shara, the ten-year-old child of this merchant, checked the seal on her container. "It's secure. No hillmouse can get through this container."

"Good. Now, check the gauge for moisture content...aren't you paying attention?" Stef noticed his daughter was staring at the sky and not listening to him. "Shara, what is it?"

She pointed up, "They're early."

Stef looked up to see a ship heading for the landing pad outside of town. "The ship isn't due for two days. Our shipment isn't ready. Wait, that's too small. That isn't the cargo ship."

The small threatening looking ship landed in the open space prepared for a much larger vessel. People around the port city slowly stopped what they were doing and came to investigate the odd visit. The company that traded with them was very prompt and always on schedule, this didn't make sense.

The hatch opened and a tall Rodian captain stepped out surrounded by a band of unsavory looking aliens of all descriptions.

A flying Toydarian asked, "I thought you said the Jedi was in main village. This is the port city."

Drak continued walking, "I know. That Jedi will be looking for any danger. Do you want to be killed before you get to collect on the bounty?"

The gang stopped as they found themselves greeted by a team of local guards. The head of the guards asked, "What business do you have here?"

Drak casually walked up to the feline guards, "We are simple merchants hoping to make a really good deal."

"What goods do you seek here?" The guard asked.

Drak was patient with his answer, giving his new band of mercenaries time to spread out a little. "I'm in need of a Jedi."

"There are no Jedi here?"

Drak slowly pulled out his gun, causing the guards to respond with their own weapons. "Oh, I think there is a Jedi here, on this world. And, I have exactly what I need to get him." He casually looked at the guard. "Hostages." When he said this his band of mercenaries lunged into the crowds and quickly grabbed any children they could get. Several had to fight for their hostage, but each returned with a child in hand. The guards attempted to respond, but they weren't quick enough. The head guard shot at Drak, but missed and was met by a blaster shot to the head.

The remaining guards were all leveling old laser rifles at the attackers. The new head guard commanded, "Release them, at once!"

"Don't worry. I promise they won't be harmed and we'll release them quickly," Drak stated calmly. "However, I must have what I want in exchange or I'll take these children and sell them on the slave market. Then I will return and we will do this again until I have my Jedi."

"How..."

Before the guard could finish his sentence, Drak commanded, "Contact all your cats on this stupid planet. Tell them my demands. Someone will tell that Jedi. You have three days."

Stef looked helplessly as he watched his daughter struggle under the grip of a big Twi-lek who held a gun to her temple.

Brain Benders

ACROSS

1. *Incognito Amazon princess, with 21A
6. Caesar's hello
9. *American pilot who bailed out over the Bermuda Triangle and washed ashore on uncharted Paradise Island in 1942, with 62A
14. Force along
15. ___ Patric Stewart
16. One drawing a bead
17. ___ blanche
18. ___ chi
19. Hunger Games competitors
20. Self center
21. *See 1A
24. Screwball
25. William, to Charles
26. Frontier friend
27. Steer clear of
30. Daze or haze
31. Click-on item
32. Small Indonesian water buffalo
35. Part of the Hindu trinity
38. Parkinson's treatment
42. Cuzco's country
43. Nuclear reactor unit
44. IncurSION
45. Upper body
47. St. Louis landmark
49. Creme-filled cookie
50. After-bath powder
52. Special ___
56. Hindu title of respect

58. Today's OSS
61. Hair coloring
62. *See 5A
64. Lennon's widow
65. Churns up
68. ___ carte
69. Do-nothing
71. Dazed and confused
72. Trash
73. Belt
74. *Top Nazi agent who planned to steal the \$2 bill engraving plates and use them to collapse the American economy
75. Permit
76. *Head of I.C.O.P.E.

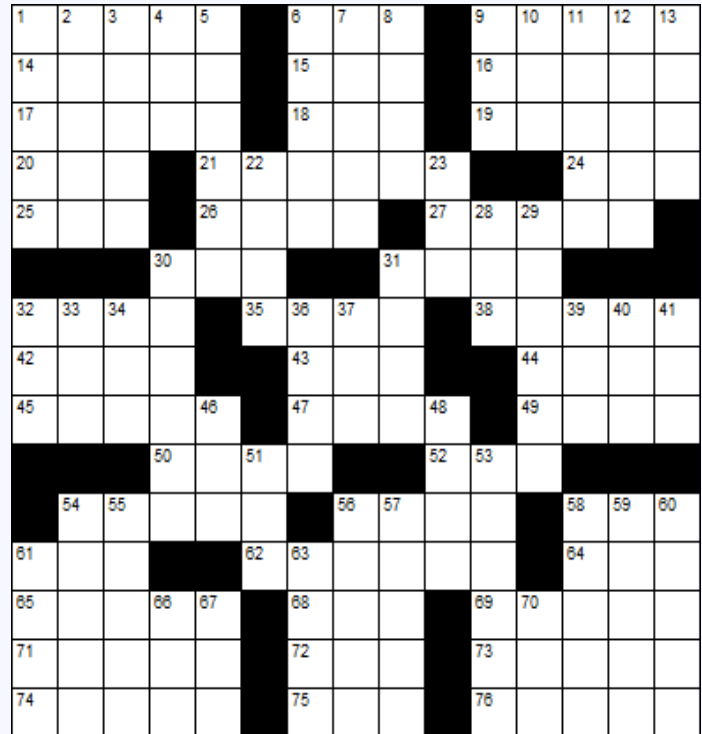


DOWN

1. Chops finely
2. Adult insect
3. Plane's parking place
4. Bottom line
5. Syria's most populous city
6. Buzzing
7. Choice dish
8. * ___ Landau, Phoenix Records executive
9. Was in session
10. Even finish
11. Correct, as text
12. Event locale
13. Formerly, formerly
22. ___-to-riches
23. Common Market inits.
28. TV remote abbr.
29. *Combat commander from the planet

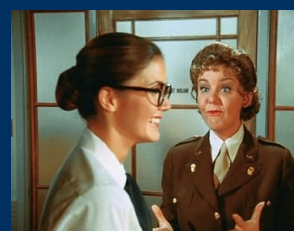
- Octopus who sought Wonder Woman's help in defeating the body and mind stealing Skrill
30. *Nazi Wonder Woman
31. *Crime fighting org. that 1A and the son of of 5A were agents of
32. Liable
33. Opposite of paleo-
34. Hockey great Bobby
36. *31D's computer: Abbr.
37. Alternate: Abbr.
39. Scull propeller
40. Pecan ___
41. Without further ___
46. Symbol of might
48. King of the road
51. English ___
53. Early 20th century art movement
54. Former capital of Japan
55. Bank job
56. Prove untrue
57. "Halt!" to a salt
58. Ratio punctuation
59. Like noble gases
60. Main artery
61. Attraction
63. *Nazi captain who led a raid on Paradise Island to steal Feminium
66. Meadow
67. ___ Fernando Valley
70. Forensic science tool

ESB Crockett's Spirited Crossword Puzzle *Super Heroine TV Adventure Series, 1975 - 1979 by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa - January 2017



Answers to Previous Puzzle

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



More Brain Benders

SUDOKU PUZZLE

January 2017
 Very Easy Non-Symmetrical
 by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to December's Sudoku Puzzle
 Hard Symmetrical

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

WORD SEARCH

Jan's Topic: Lynda Carter Roles
 Look for 19 character names
 by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to December's Word Search:
 Adam West Roles

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

Brain Benders

Word Search

January's Word List:

Azura	Lee Reston
Bobbi Dee	Lynda Carter
Brooke Newman	Lynette
Diana Prince	Magnolia
Diane Young	Mary Alice
Emily Hayworth	Pauline
Gormlaith	Vicky
Helen Chase	Wonder Woman
Helen Durant	Zelda
Kate Carlin	



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