



Crockett's Spirit

Impavidus Scribere Veritas — The Brave Write the Truth



Volume 5 Issue 3

March 2017

A Message from the Base Commander

by Maj. Gen. J. Tanner

First off, I want to apologize for my lack of presence aboard the base. I've been very busy in living life right now, specifically looking to buy a house among other things. I've been looking for over a year, but have really focused on it these past few months because I'm ready to move on from my current arrangement I'm in at the moment.



I'm happy to report that I have finally found a house. It's currently being remodeled so I hope to have a little more time to be on here. However, as you can imagine, I will be busy making decisions, packing, and getting all my financial ducks in a roll for the next couple of months. So my attendance may still be sporadic.

I wanted to assure everyone that my lack of participation isn't due to neglect. Sometimes there are other things that are more important in life and I hope everyone understands that. I know we have some promotions that are overdue and I hope to get to that shortly. I want to thank everyone who continues to support ESB and all the help that you provide.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Msg. from the Base Cmdr. | Fic. by Capt Wynan
- 2 thru 4 Col. 1 Fiction by Capt Wynan cont'd
- 4 Col. 2 thru 9 Fiction by ENS Star Eagle
- 10 thru 11 Fiction by CAPT Two Wolves
- 12 thru 14 Fiction by LTJG Ashinaga
- 15 Crossword Puzzle
- 16 Sudoku & Word Search Puzzles
- 17 Word Search List / Humor | ESB & CS Staff

Fiction

Fallen Angel - Part 38

by Capt Wynan

Henderson carried Angel into the infirmary with a weary Professor Pearson following several seconds behind. Eager to know how Lillian had fared, Angel asked, "Is she going to be alright?"

"She is very weak, but the healers are doing all they can with the plants," Henderson said as he walked into the dimly lit room where the little girl lay. Gently he sat Angel in a chair next to the bed and stepped back.

A native healer came over to check Angel's injured ankle. He spoke to her in clipped, grunted tones.

Angel responded adamantly to the healer in his language. Then she explained to the others, "I will not go into another room. Anything needed to be done for me can be done here or not done at all. I will not leave her."

The healer bowed his head and left the room, soon he returned with a small potted plant, setting it down next to Angel's injured ankle. Sensing the injury, the plant crept towards Angel's injury and soon covered the ankle. The vines covering the small child in the bed had left her hands and face free. Angel took one of the small child's hands and held it. Boomer was sitting on the other side of the bed holding her other hand.

Henderson guided the professor out of the room and into another where he could lie down on a bed. The professor sat on the edge of the bed, looked up at the big burly man and said, "Why aren't the plants healing her as quickly as they did you?"

Henderson sat down heavily into a chair next to the bed, rubbing his face tiredly he said, "Well, it seems this sleeping thing she has has been around since the natives first moved here. After

(Continued on Page 2)

(Continued from Page 1)

so many years and generations they have grown immune to it. You get it by coming into contact with stagnant water like that which she fell into in the quicksand. She was in it for several hours and so she got a very heavy dose of it."

"But surely the plant can get the virus or whatever this is out of her system, yes?" the professor asked.

"Unfortunately the plants haven't had to deal with it in a very long time and with Lillian's system being alien to this planet, they just don't know. It killed almost half of the natives who contracted it when it was first discovered. It slowly shut down the body and they never woke up," Henderson said as he slumped back in his chair.

"Henderson, you should go get some rest yourself. The professor suggested." Then he asked, "Do the rest know of Lillian's plight?"

"Yes, they all know, they have been working feverishly trying to get the ship ready to launch. Most haven't had a chance to come see her yet. Captain Moore had been in with her steadily until Boomer sent him out to get some rest as well," Henderson told him.

The professor stretched out on the cot on top of the covers not even bothering to take off his shoes. He closed his tired bloodshot eyes and was sound asleep in seconds.

Henderson envied his friend as he slowly, achingly got up from the chair, walked through the door closing it softly behind him. He went to his own room and lay on the bed as well, stopping long enough to pull off his shoes and socks. He stretched out on the bed feeling every muscle in his aching body slowly start to relax. He let out a sigh that felt like it came from the depths of his soul. He closed his eyes hoping sleep would claim him as quickly as it did his friend the professor.

The next morning, the professor awoke to find the sun shining brightly in the window. It was mid-morning by the look of the sun. Sitting up, he got out of bed and quickly splashed water on his face from a basin sitting on a nearby table to wash the sleep from his eyes. He tried to brush some of the wrinkles out of his clothes. Seeing he wasn't getting them out he shook his head and walked out of his room to the room where Lillian rested and knocked softly on the door.

"Come in," Boomer answered quietly.

Professor Pearson opened the door and tiptoed in. Softly he asked, "How is she doing this morning?"

"No change I'm afraid," Boomer said as he stood up and stretched his arms over his head while twisting his torso trying to work some of the kinks out of his tired, sore muscles. The hard wooden chair he had sat in all night had done him no favors. He took

his seat again and said, "The native healers came in during the night to check on Lillian and took the plant from around Angel's ankle. I guess it's better now but when they checked on her," gesturing to the child lying on the bed, "they put the small plant on the bed so it too could help her."

The professor walked over to the side of the bed and bent down to look at the child. Her skin was pale and her breathing was shallow. Gently he lifted an eyelid to check her pupil's reaction to light.

The crestfallen look on his face told Boomer what he feared but asked anyway. "Is she going to be alright?"

The professor shook his head and said, "Frankly, I don't know. But it really doesn't look good right now." The professor looked down at Angel who had her head resting on the edge of the bed with her eyes closed holding the child's hand. Eying their hands he said, "One of the vines had wrapped itself around both their hands.

"I wonder why the plant is connecting to both of them," Henderson responded.

A native healer came in, softly closing the door behind him. He moved silently to the bedside, bent down and with his hands he checked the child's pulse, then her eye response. He also checked the plant to see if it needed to be trimmed of any brown or dying leaves. He spotted the branch of the vine wrapped around Lillian and Angel's hand and drew in a sharp breath. He turned on his heel and hurried out.

"I wonder what the heck that was all about," the professor blurted.

"I don't know, but I'm curious to find out." Boomer came around and gently shook Angel's shoulder just as Henderson came into the room.

The professor explained what had just happened with the native healer. Shortly afterwards, two more healers came back in with the original one and stood at the foot of the bed as they talked in the guttural tones of their native tongue.

Angel sat up. With her free hand, she rubbed the sleep from her eyes, opened them and looked at the natives. She followed their gaze to the vines of the healing plant wrapped jointly around hers and Lillian's hands. She conversed with them for several minutes.

"What are they saying?" queried the professor.

"They are surprised that the plant attached to Lillian has also attached itself to me. They think it might be using me to help filter the toxins out of her body in an effort to heal her. They don't know if it will work. I told them to do whatever is necessary. I will sacrifice myself in order to save her if necessary," Angel told him.

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from Page 2)

gathered and prepared ourselves in the middle of this Winternight to mark the ending of the old year and the beginning of the new. Let us begin by cleansing and protecting this sacred space.”

In all the years that Elzivreth had lived and tended the Grove—even now, during the reign of the Undying One—no evil presence or force had invaded it. Its sacred nature alone prevented this, the fact that not one of the Children of the Living World had ever done anything evil here to disrupt that sacred state. Another reason was that Elzivreth and her followers made sure to keep its nature pure by doing good here and by tending to the physical and spiritual needs of the Grove itself. A cleansing ritual such as this helps to buffet the sacred energies of this place so that even the denizens of the unholy dead—the Gothrans—could not set one foot upon it without being utterly destroyed.

As if on cue, Jaen intoned a single chord, soon joined by the voices of the four other members who were there, each one standing behind a pillar at a cardinal point in a radius of twenty-five feet from the center.

Elzivreth continued. “We cleanse this sacred circle by the power of Mother-Father Vanthea, the Living World. We ask that your divine love, the greatest power we know, drive out all evil spirits and forces from this, the Sacred Grove.” She then intoned her own chord.

A few seconds passed, the intonations slowly getting louder. Then, a pinpoint of golden-white light appeared between Elzivreth and Jaen, about ten feet above them. It expanded, slowly at first but then faster as the group continued their chords. The translucent light formed into a hemisphere that spread from the center to each of the four cardinal points, then to the four large trees behind each cardinal point, to the ring of smaller mounds beyond, then to the ring of trees lining the edge of the Grove, a total area of a quarter mile. It even spread to the path leading down to the courtyard along the northern side of the Grove and the abbey jutting out from its base. Like a ripple emanating from a pebble tossed into a pond, the intensity of the light began to fade the farther out it went. The energy behind the light, however, still remained.

Everyone stopped their intonations. Elzivreth lowered her arms.

Jaen continued the ritual. “As we have cleansed this sacred space,” he began, “let us now keep it protected. We ask, oh Mother-Father, that your divine love and power keep all evils away from us. We ask that only good, helpful and loving spirits may enter. And we promise that no blood shall be spilt, no lies shall be spoken, and no hatred shall come from our hearts.” He turned to face the East. “Let us now summon the spirits of the Elemental Guardians,” he finished.

Liara stood at the eastern point of the circle, facing west. She was a gnemling whose auburn hair had a natural curl to it. Standing three and a half feet tall, she had a slender build. Her white robe had a sash of light gray and yellow, the colors used for air.

“I call to you, Guardian of the Air and of the East,” she began, raising her arms and turning to face that direction. While most people of her race felt an affinity to

earth, she had always felt a closer personal connection to the element of air. “I summon the powers of the air, the powers of thought and invention. I call to the powers of the cloud, the gentle breeze, the cyclone and the mighty gale. Attend to us and commune with us. We welcome you with blessings and in gratitude.”

The branches of the great elm tree behind her started to sway, and a great gust rustled the leaves. On the pedestal behind her lay a large smoky quartz crystal that began to glow faintly. As the glow increased, a translucent form began to coalesce just behind Liara. It was a winged figure, colored pale yellow and standing ten feet tall. It held an enormous bow in its left hand and a javelin-sized arrow in the other. Everything about this figure was composed entirely of energy.

“In the names of the East and the Living World, I greet you,” it spoke, its voice echoing throughout the Grove.

As Liara lowered her arms and turned back to face the center, Adilund raised his arms at the southern point of the circle and turned to face the South. He was a feyn in his mid-twenties who kept his blond locks just past the nape of his neck. He stood three inches short of six feet and, though he looked like an eldrin male, he was actually half eldrin and half human. His sash was a medium blue and white, the colors used for water and snow.

“I call to you, Guardian of the South, Element of Water. As the winds move the clouds, the clouds bring the rains. I summon the powers of will and intent, and I call forth the forces of the gentle rains and the streams, the lakes and the oceans, and the power of the storm. In this Winternight, I also call forth the powers of snow and ice. Attend to us and commune with us. We welcome you with blessings and in gratitude.”

The chunk of unworked sapphire on the pedestal behind him began to glow, and before long another translucent figure appeared. This one was blue, also ten feet in height, and it carried a huge wooden staff. It appeared between Adilund and the giant aspen tree that lay behind him, whose trembling leaves were coated with dew.

“In the names of the South and of the Living World, I greet you,” it answered, in the same manner as the first guardian.

Now it was Junithor's turn. She was a stocky dorv, standing four and a half feet tall; she was almost as wide as she was tall. It was mostly muscle mass, however. She had woven her red hair into a ponytail behind her. Her sash was embroidered with brown and black, colors that stood for earth and stone. As a dorvin woman, her strong affinity to the element of earth was almost a foregone conclusion. After committing the same acts as her other companions, she began. “Guardian of Earth, Defender of the West, I call to you. I call upon the powers of earth, stone, metal and crystal. As the clouds bring the rain, the rain falls upon the ground, and thus life is born, just as the trees that inhabit this sacred place. Then it is nurtured to fulfill its purpose. Idea

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from Page 3)

"I don't know how much longer I can sit here and do nothing while feeling so helpless, I have to do something." Boomer said.

"Why don't you go see if they need any help with the rocket?" Henderson suggested, gently resting his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Yeah, I'll go on out and see what I can do to help," Boomer said. He looked down at *his* little girl as she lay sleeping, death possibly only a hair's breadth away. He gently stroked her hair, bent down and kissed her on the forehead. "Come back to us little one," He said imploringly. Then he turned and left out the door.

Two of the healers stepped out of the room and soon returned with several more plants which they set on the bedside between Angel and Lillian. Their vines wound up towards the small girl as well as towards the young woman sitting next to her. Two more natives brought in a cot, had Angel stand as they moved the cot next to the bed so Angel could lie down next to Lillian. The Plants soon entwined themselves around both bodies. Angel closed her eyes, willing her energy to help the pale little girl lying still next to her.

The professor took up a post in the chair where Boomer had been sitting earlier. All but one of the healers left the room. The original one stayed behind and monitored the two patients. The professor dozed off.

The rest of the afternoon saw the sun creep ever so slowly along its arc across the sky, and time stood still for those in the small room.

Professor Pearson was awake when Captain Moore came into the room around suppertime to check on his people. "How are they doing?" he asked.

"They've been sleeping but I think maybe, just maybe, the process might be working. These people haven't done this type of thing before but since Angel is part of the planet they are hoping she has a natural immunity to the sleeping disease where Lillian does not," the professor said. "By the way, have you seen Boomer? He said he wanted to help with the rocket."

"No, I haven't. I thought he was here with Lillian," Moore said,

"This has hit Boomer very hard. He fears he will lose his child and feels helpless to do anything about it." the professor said. "He seemed exceedingly agitated and mumbled something about going to help. I assumed he was talking about the rocket."

Captain Moore looked down at the pale, still forms of Angel and Lillian lying on the beds next to each other, Angel's hand still holding the small child's hand, their breathing so shallow they looked almost gone. "Where the blue nebula is Boomer? He is needed here!"

Fiction

The Vanthean Chronicles: Tyranny's Dawn—Book 1

by ENS Star Eagle

TWO: ELZIVRETH

THE CHILDREN OF the Living World had gathered at their Sacred Grove to observe and celebrate the passing of the year. Six people were in attendance; hundreds would have been here centuries before, but the ancient religion had declined since the World Soul fell asleep more than 700 years ago. Still, Matron Elzivreth and her followers remained, tending the Grove and helping to feed, clothe and heal anyone who needed any or all of those things.

Elzivreth stood six feet tall, an average height for an eldrin woman. Her long hair was completely white but for a ring of silver that encircled the crown of her head. Her ears were perched toward the front and both sides of her forehead; they were similar in shape to a cat's, but furless. Her violet eyes accented her high cheekbones, and her thin lips finished her dignified persona. Even though she was 552 years old, she appeared to be a woman one-tenth that age. Her white robe had a pearlescent quality, and its trim was woven with primary and secondary colors plus black, white, silver, gold and gray. Every member had a trim of this kind, symbolizing the wondrous diversity of creation. Her sash was embroidered with green, the color of trees and all plant life.

Standing in front of her were two white columns, each about three feet high and topped with square white pedestals. Atop the pedestal to her left were four tree seeds: elm, aspen, oak and red maple. On the one to her right was a stone remnant that had fallen to the world long ago, glistening with flecks of dark black, gray and silver.

Across from her stood Jaen, a human male in his sixties. He was a few inches shorter than Elzivreth, and he stood with the aid of an intricately carved oak staff. As she faced south, he faced north. He was clean-shaven and his silver hair was peppered. It gracefully draped down to his neck. His green eyes sparkled, revealing a playful nature. His robe was the same as Elzivreth's but for the silver-embroidered sash that he wore.

He grinned. "Well...none of us is growing any younger."

Elzivreth rolled her eyes. "You are terrible," she retorted.

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from Page 4)

She raised her arms and then spoke. "We have gathered and prepared ourselves in the middle of this Winternight to mark the ending of the old year and the beginning of the new. Let us begin by cleansing and protecting this sacred space."

In all the years that Elzivreth had lived and tended the Grove—even now, during the reign of the Undying One—no evil presence or force had invaded it. Its sacred nature alone prevented this, the fact that not one of the Children of the Living World had ever done anything evil here to disrupt that sacred state. Another reason was that Elzivreth and her followers made sure to keep its nature pure by doing good here and by tending to the physical and spiritual needs of the Grove itself. A cleansing ritual such as this helps to buffet the sacred energies of this place so that even the denizens of the unholy dead—the Gothrans—could not set one foot upon it without being utterly destroyed.

As if on cue, Jaen intoned a single chord, soon joined by the voices of the four other members who were there, each one standing behind a pillar at a cardinal point in a radius of twenty-five feet from the center.

Elzivreth continued. "We cleanse this sacred circle by the power of Mother-Father Vanthea, the Living World. We ask that your divine love, the greatest power we know, drive out all evil spirits and forces from this, the Sacred Grove." She then intoned her own chord.

A few seconds passed, the intonations slowly getting louder. Then, a pinpoint of golden-white light appeared between Elzivreth and Jaen, about ten feet above them. It expanded, slowly at first but then faster as the group continued their chords. The translucent light formed into a hemisphere that spread from the center to each of the four cardinal points, then to the four large trees behind each cardinal point, to the ring of smaller mounds beyond, then to the ring of trees lining the edge of the Grove, a total area of a quarter mile. It even spread to the path leading down to the courtyard along the northern side of the Grove and the abbey jutting out from its base. Like a ripple emanating from a pebble tossed into a pond, the intensity of the light began to fade the farther out it went. The energy behind the light, however, still remained.

Everyone stopped their intonations. Elzivreth lowered her arms.

Jaen continued the ritual. "As we have cleansed this sacred space," he began, "let us now keep it protected. We ask, oh Mother-Father, that your divine love and power keep all evils away from us. We ask that only good, helpful and loving spirits may enter. And we promise that no blood shall be spilt, no lies shall be spoken, and no hatred shall come from our hearts." He turned to face the East. "Let us now summon the spirits of the Elemental Guardians," he finished.

Liara stood at the eastern point of the circle, facing west. She was a gnemling whose auburn hair had a natural curl to it. Standing three and a half feet tall, she had a slender build. Her white robe had a sash of light gray and yellow, the colors used for air.

"I call to you, Guardian of the Air and of the East," she began, raising her arms and turning to face that di-

rection. While most people of her race felt an affinity to earth, she had always felt a closer personal connection to the element of air. "I summon the powers of the air, the powers of thought and invention. I call to the powers of the cloud, the gentle breeze, the cyclone and the mighty gale. Attend to us and commune with us. We welcome you with blessings and in gratitude."

The branches of the great elm tree behind her started to sway, and a great gust rustled the leaves. On the pedestal behind her lay a large smoky quartz crystal that began to glow faintly. As the glow increased, a translucent form began to coalesce just behind Liara. It was a winged figure, colored pale yellow and standing ten feet tall. It held an enormous bow in its left hand and a javelin-sized arrow in the other. Everything about this figure was composed entirely of energy.

"In the names of the East and the Living World, I greet you," it spoke, its voice echoing throughout the Grove.

As Liara lowered her arms and turned back to face the center, Adilund raised his arms at the southern point of the circle and turned to face the South. He was a feyn in his mid-twenties who kept his blond locks just past the nape of his neck. He stood three inches short of six feet and, though he looked like an eldrin male, he was actually half eldrin and half human. His sash was a medium blue and white, the colors used for water and snow.

"I call to you, Guardian of the South, Element of Water. As the winds move the clouds, the clouds bring the rains. I summon the powers of will and intent, and I call forth the forces of the gentle rains and the streams, the lakes and the oceans, and the power of the storm. In this Winternight, I also call forth the powers of snow and ice. Attend to us and commune with us. We welcome you with blessings and in gratitude."

The chunk of unworked sapphire on the pedestal behind him began to glow, and before long another translucent figure appeared. This one was blue, also ten feet in height, and it carried a huge wooden staff. It appeared between Adilund and the giant aspen tree that lay behind him, whose trembling leaves were coated with dew.

"In the names of the South and of the Living World, I greet you," it answered, in the same manner as the first guardian.

Now it was Junithor's turn. She was a stocky dorv, standing four and a half feet tall; she was almost as wide as she was tall. It was mostly muscle mass, however. She had woven her red hair into a ponytail behind her. Her sash was embroidered with brown and black, colors that stood for earth and stone. As a dorvin woman, her strong affinity to the element of earth was almost a foregone conclusion. After committing the same acts as her other companions, she began. "Guardian of Earth, Defender of the West, I call to you. I call upon the powers of earth, stone, metal and crystal. As the clouds bring the rain, the rain falls upon the ground, and thus life is born, just as the trees that inhabit this sacred place. Then it is nurtured to fulfill its purpose. Idea

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from Page 5)

leads to intention, which then leads to manifestation. Attend to us, great Guardian, and commune with us. We welcome you with blessings and in gratitude.”

As before, another translucent Elemental Guardian appeared, this one colored green and brandishing a huge axe. It greeted the assembly as its kindred had done. The onyx on Junithor’s pedestal glowed a curious black light, and the oak tree behind the Guardian glowed faintly as well.

The task of summoning the Guardian of the North fell to Tyrstan. Though he was a theryan—a shape-changer—he was presently in his human form. He appeared as a handsome man in his late twenties who had a trim beard and mustache which were the same brunette color as his hair. Like all good smiths, he wore his long hair knotted three times in the back. His sash had red embroidery, the color used for fire. He stood between an uncut ruby on the pedestal in front of him, and a giant red maple tree behind him. After performing the same motions as everyone else, he spoke. “Guardian of the North, Keeper of Fire, I call on you this Winternight. I call forth the powers of the candle flame, the hearth fire and the inferno. I summon the power of transformation. As the clouds carry the rains that fall on the earth and create the trees, the wood is then burned to give heat and light. The ashes blow back into the wind, carried in the air, and then the circle is complete. Attend to us, Friend, and commune with us. We welcome you with blessings and in gratitude.”

As the ruby began to glow, the final Guardian appeared as a translucent red figure with an enormous greatsword. It greeted the others and then stood back, like the other Guardians.

Jaen pointed his staff to the night sky. It was in his left hand. His right hand, open, also pointed upward. He looked at all the bright stars in the night sky, as well as some of the moons that were out this evening. A comet even shone brightly this night in the sky to the north. The great blue planet Shiar’kun was nowhere to be seen, but everyone present knew that at this very moment the Winternight was passing from the old year to the new. Right now Shiar’kun was exactly between Vanthea and its sun. In just a few days the First Dawn would begin, signaling the true beginning of winter. Until then, however, the days would still be dark, since the blue planet was eclipsing the sun. On a Winternight evening such as this, however, the stars and moons seemed to shine even brighter than at any other time of the year.

“Great Vanth, I call to you,” Jaen began. “You are all that is masculine of this world. You are the Warrior, the Father and the Sage. You are forever seeking, reaching outside of yourself to learn that which is unknown. You are the Creator of life. As I call to you, I also reach out to call to the Star-Spirits, to our Grandfather Shiar’kun, to the spirits of all the moons and to Ahn, our sun. Attend to us, and commune with us. We offer each of you our blessings and our thanks.”

The chunk of meteorite in front of him was not only glowing, but also levitating about a foot above the pedestal. A few small chunks of it had come off and were

now orbiting the main rock. It was now a model of their own solar system.

A few moments passed; Jaen waited patiently. He kept his eyes peeled toward the great outer ring of trees that surrounded the Grove. Then they came, slowly and subtly. Ethereal columns of white light, each about twenty feet tall, began to appear just above the tree line. They shimmered and sparkled slightly, reminding Jaen of the ice crystals in the night sky when he was a young man in the north, when the ambient light from the other moons and the extreme cold combined to create those lovely columns of ice-light. Tonight the Star-Spirits said nothing, but their presence was felt nonetheless. They brought with them a sense of peace and patience that only those who live for eons could possess.

As Jaen lowered his hands and staff, Elzivreth opened her arms to the ground. “I call to you, Thea, Mother of us all. You are the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone. You are all that is feminine in the world. You are the Sustainer of life. You are always peering inward for the answers from within. You are the plants, the trees, the beasts, the birds and the fish in the seas. You are all life, and you provide it in abundance.”

She remembered these rituals from when she was a child, back when her father was a Knight of the Living World. She saw the crowds of believers in her mind, and she saw the spirits of the World-Father and the World-Mother appear then, and they would combine to form one being, both—and neither—male and female. She remembered when they could actually talk with their world, when they could ask questions and receive instructions for how to help others and to help improve themselves. That was long ago, however, before the world went to sleep. Now, the only time one could truly interact with the world was in the realm of deep dreams. Still, Vanthea kept the cycles of life and death in balance. Even in a dormant state, the world could still show a token of interaction.

“Attend to us and commune with us,” she continued. “We offer you our blessings and our thanks.”

She waited patiently, as Jaen had done. The seeds began to glow with a soft golden-green light. Then, an unseen force made them explode into life. Miniature roots and branches came out of each one, and they started weaving in and out of one another’s paths. Four main branches formed out of the chaos, intertwining and stretching into a staff that was slightly taller than Elzivreth herself. When it was done growing, a skin of bark appeared and grew over the entire object. The soft glow remained.

Elzivreth gently grabbed the staff, holding it with both arms at chest-level. She addressed everyone. “Though we cannot see the sun, and though we cannot see Shiar’kun, we light the fires as a symbol of our faith in the future, and our belief in the cycles of the universe. As the old year passes, we offer our gratitude for our lives and the ability to be of service to others. As the new year comes, we look forward with joy and anticipation to being of service once again.”

Four large piles of brush and firewood lay between

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from Page 6)

each of the four cardinal point trees. Elzivreth walked over to the Guardian of Air and presented it with the staff. It put its bow and arrows away and accepted the staff, aiming it at the woodpile between it and the Guardian of Water. As it began to intone, a pulse of yellow light emanated from the staff and struck the pile of wood, immediately setting it ablaze in yellow firelight. The Guardian of Air then went silent and passed the staff to the Guardian of Water, who repeated the same process. This time, the light coming from the staff was blue, creating a huge fire of blazing blue flames. Twice more the process was repeated, creating bonfires of green and then red. Elzivreth finally approached the Guardian of Fire, who returned the staff to her. She took it back to the center and gently laid it on the ground.

"We now invite any friendly spirits to speak with us. If you have any messages, please tell us," she said.

For a moment, the only things anyone could hear were the crackling of the bonfires and the wind passing through the trees. The Guardian of Air finally spoke. "I bring unfortunate news from the East. Ishtredanae the Golden Voice of the dragons, has passed away. Her spirit rejoined its source in the Spirit Realm nearly one month ago."

Jaen walked to Elzivreth and put his arm around her. They both bowed their heads for a time. All the others were silent.

"She was one of the last dragons who believed as we do," she said quietly. "Her passing has left all of us diminished..."

"We must pray that her spirit can return to its soul in divine love, peace and clarity," added Jaen. Everyone bowed their heads for several seconds.

The Guardian of Fire spoke. "I bring news from the North. This very night, a great army, led by Prince Dacien, advances to the Spire. He carries the Sword of Souls to vanquish Gul-Gothra." It faced Elzivreth. "Use your power of seeing, if you wish to know what is transpiring," it finished.

"So...that would explain it," she said softly.

Jaen waited a few seconds, but Elzivreth wasn't cooperating. "And just what exactly would that explain?" he asked.

"That quiet sense of foreboding I've had for the past few weeks," she answered.

"And you didn't see fit to share this feeling with anybody?"

"Oh, Jaen; you should know me better than that by now. I never want to say anything unless I have some kind of proof."

"I'm sure the prince will be victorious," Jaen reassured. "After all, he carries with him one of the most powerful artifacts in all the realm."

Liara stepped forward. "I beg pardon, but I must ask. Just what is this 'Sword of Souls?'"

Tyrstan answered. "Its name is Devondriel. It's over 3000 years old, and it contains the souls of all the eldrin kings, from the first to the last."

Junithor spoke up. "It's supposed to give the wielder control of the dead."

"What good would that do?" asked Liara.

Adilund blinked at her and stared for a second. "Don't you think a sword like that would be the perfect weapon to use against the self-proclaimed 'Lord of the Dead?'"

Liara blushed. Tyrstan stepped in. "I hope to forge a weapon that's even more powerful," he grinned.

"It's not him I'm concerned with," began Elzivreth. "It's Lady Maralyth. I've had a feeling something is terribly wrong with her." She sighed. "But there's no way of knowing for sure."

"Surely we would've received some word by now if she were not well," Jaen comforted.

Everyone in the Grove at least knew of Maralyth even if they hadn't known her personally. Elzivreth and Jaen spoke of her from time to time. She was a former acolyte of Elzivreth's who had showed great potential, and she was beloved by the matron. She was also a princess, sister to King Petric Maridon of Elrian, the particular dominion of the Obsidian Empire. She left the city of Havenshore, as well as the Grove, to become the wife of Prince Dacien of the house of Zahothniel. She was human and he was eldrin; their union had not been without consequences.

Jaen raised his voice. "I will need all of your help. Gather to me," he said, motioning with his hands. The other four people gathered around him. "We must pray for the prince and for all who accompany him. We must also pray for the princess, who steadfastly remains in our hearts. We must pray for protection, for victory and for peace."

Elzivreth turned around, looking at each of the Guardians. She faced the Guardian of Fire and asked, "Guardians, please help me. Will you drum for me so that I may more easily see from afar?" Normally, she would have used her own drum to help achieve the proper state of consciousness to help her spirit leave the body. She would then temporarily join another person or an animal to perceive through it what was happening. Tonight, however, she simply hadn't thought it necessary to bring it here with her.

The Fire Guardian looked back at her and replied, "We are together with you. We shall do as you have asked."

At this, its greatsword transformed into a large drum within a few seconds. It held the drum by the back with its left hand, and a drumstick appeared in its right hand. This happened with each of the Guardians. As Elzivreth crossed her legs and sat down upon the grass, they started beating softly in a slow four-four rhythm.

Elzivreth closed her eyes and began praying. "Vanth, World-Father, I call to you to help me. I need your power to look without, to find a friend that is close to the Spire who can show me what we desire to know. Please help me with your ever-questing power."

She listened to her heart, and then she listened to the drumming. The rhythms were one and the same, as if the Guardians could feel her heartbeat from where she was sitting. Perhaps they could

Jaen was leading in prayers. The four acolytes were

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from Page 7)

huddled around him, repeating everything he said. They kept the prayers quiet, just louder than whispers, so that Elzivreth could concentrate without distraction.

The drumming slowly increased in rapidity at first, matching the beating of Elzivreth's heart. Soon it gained in speed and intensity as Elzivreth's heart beat faster and faster. She never knew if the drumming responded to her quickening heartbeat or actually caused its beating faster, but it made no difference. The drumming continued, fast and powerful, for a few more seconds. Elzivreth's heart raced.

Then they both stopped. Elzivreth opened her eyes wide, but instead of her own, they were now the eyes of a hawk. Her heart—and the drumming—both started again, very slowly and softly.

"I thank you, brother hawk," she whispered, almost silently. Her spirit was now with the magnificent bird, and she could see the Spire and all that was happening around it, even though it was several hundred miles away.

Jaen tapped Liara's shoulder and asked her to keep leading in prayers. He turned and went over to Elzivreth. Using his staff, he knelt down beside her. He was sure not to touch her, however. "I am here," he said. "If you can, tell me what you see."

"I see many men," she began. "Elderen, Humans...Dorven...Stouts and Feyn. They are battling the dead...and they are losing." She could see the Gothrans rising from the snow-covered ground in droves. Those with weapons used them. Those without used their hands and their teeth, both twisted into gnarled, sharp points. Malevolent ghosts appeared from nowhere, stealing the very souls of the men who tried to fight them. In the background, of course, stood the Spire, a black spindled tower at least two hundred feet tall, resembling an enormous dead tree. It glowed with a faint black haze, its mere presence filling both the army and the very land with foreboding, especially when silhouetted by the gray winter clouds.

Every man of every race fought courageously at first, but as the dead kept coming, they began to route. Heads and limbs were severed, bodies pierced and cleft in twain, from both sides. Dorvin sorcerers used fire to consume both the undead and the newly dead to keep them from becoming abominations. Human mages worked in groups to magickally strengthen warriors. As one wave of the dead was destroyed, however, two more kept coming. Priests and generals were gathering as many men to themselves as possible to regroup and protect the warriors, but their efforts were in vain. Dorvin catapults and eldrin airships hurled fire and rocks at the Spire itself, but their efforts were also fruitless. By tomorrow, Gul-Gothra would be victorious, and the Gray Plague would spread out even farther than before.

Elzivreth suddenly gasped. "They are doomed," she whispered.

"Is there nothing..." Jaen began, but he stopped himself. He knew there was nothing more they could do.

"Wait!" spoke Elzivreth as she, through the hawk, looked in closer near the entrance to the Spire. "I see a

group of elderen. They are fleeing the Spire. They are motioning everyone to get back!"

Again she gasped at what she saw. The small group of elderen was comprised of Prince Dacien's bannermen, his personal guards and his sorcerer. She recognized his personal sigil, a winged sword backed by purple and jade green stripes with several eight-pointed stars. They were no more than one hundred feet away from the Spire—the giant tower with spindles that cut into the sky five hundred feet about the surface—when a giant thundering could be heard from deep within. Smoke appeared from the structure, pouring out of every window and doorway.

"What is going on?" asked Jaen excitedly.

"The Spire...is beginning to crumble," she responded. Cracks had appeared in the colossal structure. Within seconds, the cracks had turned into fissures, splitting the Spire from bottom to top. The spindles began to crumble and fall, hitting the dead hundreds of feet below. Those men foolish enough to stay near the structure also became victims of its demise. Within seconds, the tower complex itself was splitting apart and collapsing under its own enormous weight. A huge cloud of black and gray arose from the spot where the structure had stood just seconds before.

"Are you sure?" asked Jaen. He couldn't believe this was happening, considering what Elzivreth had said just moments before.

"Yes, I am sure! It has collapsed onto the ground, and it is no more. The dead are falling as well. There is no more magick to sustain them."

"If this is true, then the Undying One must finally be destroyed!" exclaimed Jaen, getting back up and walking to the others. "The Living World has answered our prayers! We are victorious!"

The acolytes finished praying. Liara began to cry. Adilund raised his arm into the air and yelled "Hooray for the victors!" Junithor's expression never changed as she said "About bloody time." Tyrstan merely smiled. He looked up into the night sky. Everything seemed different now, as if this one event somehow made the whole world right again.

Elzivreth spoke softly, holding back tears. The prince's bannermen had lowered his sigil to half-staff.

"Prince Dacien is dead," she whispered.

Everyone's joy turned bittersweet. All of them bowed their heads except for Tyrstan, who was still looking up. A few moments passed. He looked at the glittering Star-Spirits that were still surrounding the grove. He could hear their faint melodious songs, the music of the spheres come down to the world. He was almost lost in their song when suddenly he realized that they were speaking to him. In fact, they were speaking in song.

"Jaen," he started, "the Star Spirits are singing."

"Well yes, and they are quite beautiful," answered the old man.

"No—I mean, they are telling me something."

"What is it they sing?" asked Adilund.

"They are telling me to tell Matron Elzivreth to look

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from Page 8)

to the comet," he answered, sounding somewhat perplexed.

They all looked to Elzivreth, still at one with the hawk.

"Tell us what you see!" said Tyrstan, firmly but respectfully.

"Brother hawk, please turn 'round and look up," asked Elzivreth. In seconds, the hawk did as she requested, and she was peering at a wonder of the heavens. The comet had a long tail and was burning quite brightly.

Then it exploded.

Like a flaming crystal, fourteen shards formed from what had just been one solid object. Fourteen small tails now shown where only one had just been visible. Still, they managed to stay relatively close to one another.

"The comet has broken apart," said Elzivreth. "When there was one, now there are many."

Tyrstan put his hands to his forehead as if reacting to a headache. Liara went to him and put her hand on the back of his neck. "Are you alright?" she asked softly.

"Yes, yes...but now they say something different."

"Well, what is it, boy?" demanded Jaen.

"They say, 'They are coming,'" he responded, lifting his head back up from his hands.

"What in the hells is that supposed to mean?" asked Junithor.

"How should I know?" retorted Tyrstan. "All I can tell you is what I am hearing. Wait—it's going away now."

Elzivreth spoke softly. "Brother hawk, I must go now. I thank and honor you for your help. Now go with blessings and in peace." She then closed her eyes. The Guardians stopped drumming. She opened her eyes, and they were hers again. "Please help me," she asked. Adilund and Junithor came to her and helped her stand up. "This is a night we shall not likely forget," she mused, smiling.

The sound of rushing wind came through the trees, even though not a single one stirred. The Guardian of Air spoke. "The trees have given me another message for you. It is, 'They are here.' Who it is, I cannot tell you."

Everyone took turns glancing at one another. Finally, Jaen broke the silence. He pursed his lips. "First, it's 'They are coming.' Now, it's 'They are here.' I wish they would make up their damned minds! And just who in the hells are 'they?'"

"I do not know," responded Elzivreth, "but I believe we need to conclude this ceremony and get back to the abbey."

Everyone retook his or her place. They dismissed the Guardians, bidding them farewell with blessings and with thanks. They bade the Star-Spirits goodbye and thanked them as well. In a single line they left the Grove and headed down the path toward the courtyard that surrounded the abbey, which they all called home.

They saw smoke coming from the hearth chimney,

so they quickened their pace. The courtyard gate was opened slightly. Dancing light from the fire shown through the open windows in the common room. The abbey itself was two stories in height. The first level held the kitchen, a storage room, a dining area and a common room. The second level held their personal quarters. The structure jutted out from the hill on which the grove stood. Its two entrances were just before the hill itself; from there, one could either walk past the stairs and into the common room, or one could walk into the tunnel that led to the ancient temple structure around which the entire hill was constructed.

The group crept past the common room. Junithor and Tyrstan both peered into a window. "It's a human woman," whispered the dorv.

"With a baby," added Tyrstan. They both looked to Elzivreth.

At this, she raised her hand. "I will lead the way," she said. She led them into the entrance, past the stairs and around the hearth to the common room, where a young woman with cinnamon-colored hair was seated, holding a little baby wrapped in a blanket. The baby played with a lock of her hair, which came down to her bosom. When she saw Elzivreth, she got up quickly but carefully.

"Madam, I beg forgiveness," she started. "I know this is an intrusion, but I saw no one here. Prince Dacien told me to come here. This is the safest I've felt in weeks."

"And who might you be, girl?" asked Elzivreth politely but firmly.

"Her title is 'Matron,'" interrupted Junithor. The young woman looked at the dorv, then back to Elzivreth. "My name is Istrelle, Matron. I was the handmaiden of the Lady Maralyth. She bade me come here to find you in the hopes that you could help keep her daughter safe."

"You were her handmaiden?" asked Elzivreth softly. She already knew what the answer would be.

"Yes, Matron. Unfortunately, she passed away from the Gray Plague nearly a month ago." Istrelle smiled. "She spoke highly of you, fondly and often. She trusted you more than any other."

Elzivreth covered her mouth with her hand. Jaen came up behind her, putting his hand on her back. She spoke, even through her tears. "And I must tell you, my dear child, that the prince has also died, defeating the Undying One in his own lair."

Istrelle looked down at the little baby, seemingly oblivious to all the loss that had conspired to bring them here. "I think he knew this would happen. That's why they sent us here."

Elzivreth drew closer to Istrelle, motioning for her to give her the babe. She took the newborn, a little girl, and looked intently into her little face. Though she was feyn, the product of an elder and a human, she looked completely human. The baby looked back at her.

Elzivreth smiled. "And what is your name, little one?"

Istrelle first looked at Elzivreth, then at everyone else. "Her name," she announced, "is Delendra."

Fiction

The Alfore Encounter - 42

"Playing Chicken with a Starship"

by CAPT Two Wolves

When Captain K'Tal returned that evening she brought ten people with her. She did not introduce them, stating that they were her legal assistants.

"Nana, some of those people don't look like lawyers to me," Jessica whispered conspiratorially to Marisol in Spanish. If anything, the child was extremely observant.

She could be a detective, Marisol thought. "Indeed they don't. Now, hush. The Captain has her reasons for bringing security people," Marisol whispered back to her in Spanish.

Surely this is meant to be a poor attempt at humor, Sheriff's Constable T'Pell thought, as she observed the party that was there to beam up to her ship.

She'd gotten the official notice from Doctor Reese-Howard that the Hercules child and her mother were both fit to travel. So, she'd immediately beamed down with two deputies to collect her charge. However, instead of just three people, there were seventeen, plus four Track Cats, and loads of luggage.

"My ship is unable to accommodate all of you..." T'Pell started.

"What do you suggest, then?" Tony asked, knowing full well he was asking a loaded question.

"The commander will come with us. The rest of you can find another means of transportation to Vulcan," T'Pell responded coldly.

"There is no way in Hell my wife is boarding your ship without us!" Tony stated unflinchingly as he started forward only to be restrained by two burly male members of Captain K'Tal's party. Jessica winked knowingly at her grandmother.

Dios Mio! She was right! Marisol thought.

Responding to T'Pell's announcement, K'Tal calmly tapped her comm pin. "Captain K'Tal to Dionysus."

"Dionysus, here." a deep male voice replied.

"Seventeen to beam up, plus four Track Cats and luggage." K'Tal stated.

"Aye, Captain!"

Before a stunned T'Pell, the entire party sparkled into thin air.

"Welcome aboard The U. S. S. Dionysus Captain K'Tal, Commander Hercules, Doctor Gomez, and party," The Vulcan transporter tech bid them once they had all materialized.

"Are the shields up, Lieutenant?" K'Tal asked.

"As ordered, Ma'am," The Vulcan replied.

"Excellent. The quartermaster will show you to the VIP quarters, while I have a talk with Captain Wekk," K'Tal said addressing the party as quartermaster's assistants went about helping to load the luggage on an-

tigrav carriers.

Minutes later, Captain K'Tal stepped off the lift and immediately onto the Dionysus' bridge. The tiny Vulcan constable's ship was imaged in the middle of the view screen facing the Dionysus like a teacup terrier threatening a Great Dane.

"What fresh hell have you brought me?" Captain Ndaye Wekk asked in her slightly accented voice. Ndaye was Nigerian, a tall, blue-black complexioned woman who could have been a model but, instead, chose Starfleet as her career. "Disregard that. I've just been briefed by 'The Old Man'," Wekk amended.

The "Old Man" was Admiral Senna, a Vulcan of undetermined age who was the head of Starfleet's JAG. He was rarely seen, but, when he spoke, people listened and obeyed.

"He must have some inside information on Constable T'Pell, because I was ordered not place Commander Hercules in her custody," K'Tal revealed.

"She must be a winner," Wekk said.

"Yes, she is," K'Tal replied. "The past encounters I've had with her, have not been pleasant. They say Vulcans have no emotions, but she practically seethes."

"Let's beard the lion, shall we? Ensign Shadow, open a hailing frequency to the Vulcan ship," Wekk instructed.

"Hailing frequencies open, Aye," The Catellain Communications Officer replied.

Before Wekk could issue the standard greeting, T'Pell launched into a fifteen minute tirade listing the numerous Vulcan laws K'Tal violated by *forcibly* taking her prisoner away. Wekk allowed her to natter on until finally, she put up her right hand in the universal sign of "stop".

"First of all, Commander Hercules-Gomez is not a Vulcan citizen. She is, however, a Starfleet Officer and is entitled to the full rights and protection of Starfleet before and during her trial. Your attempt to kidnap her, despite the fact she had just given birth, carries even more egregious charges, Constable T'Pell. I'm surprised you are unaware of that," Wekk said coolly. T'Pell wisely kept her mouth shut but glared back through the view screen.

"Constable T'Pell, you have only one option. Either move out of my way, or I will run you through," Wekk added, then signaled Shadow to cut communications.

"Helm, set course for Vulcan, one quarter impulse speed!" Wekk commanded. The Vulcan ship reversed direction, matched the Dionysus' speed and stayed in front of her.

"PataQ!" K'Tal swore.

"Agreed," Wekk said.

"Helm, increase speed to full impulse!" Wekk ordered.

"Full impulse aye, Captain!" The Dionysus increased speed; so did the Vulcan ship.

"T'Yon, what is the maximum speed of that ship?" Wekk asked her Science Officer.

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from Page 10)

"The XR765 is capable of Warp Two maximum, Captain," was the reply.

Fifteen minutes lapsed.

"For the sake of curiosity, are you intent upon allowing her to, as you humans say, 'dog us' during our entire trip to Vulcan?" T'Yon asked.

"Absolutely not, T'Yon," Wekk replied.

"Helm, increase speed to warp one!" she ordered.

As The Dionysus increased speed, the Vulcan ship also increased speed.

After fifteen more minutes...

"Helm, increase speed to warp two!"

"Warp two aye, Captain!"

"Captain, the maximum speed of warp two is not meant to be maintained for a lengthy period of time," T'Yon warned. "Her engines will go critical and..."

"I'm well aware of that, T'Yon. Any captain who is willing to push her ship to such an extreme heedless of the lives of her crew proves she is mentally unsound," Wekk said castigatingly. "Admiral Senna was correct in advising against surrendering Hercules-Gomez to her," she added.

"The Vulcan ships engines have reached critical," T'Yon announced.

"Drop shields and beam the occupants directly to the brig. Then raise shields and conduct evasive maneuvers," Wekk ordered. Two minutes later the small Vulcan vessel exploded. Dionysus was slightly buffeted with no damage.

"Brig to Captain Wekk."

"Yes, Lieutenant Frakes," Wekk responded.

"Captain, you have some very angry prisoners in the brig," Lieutenant Frakes announced.

"Excellent. Let them cool their jets. I have more important matters to attend to right now," Wekk said. "Number One, you have the Conn, she instructed her first officer, then she headed for the lift with K'Tal in tow.

"I'm anxious to meet our guests," Wekk said.

"You will love them," K'Tal replied. "Especially Constable T'Pell.

* * * * *

Half an hour later on Azotan, Janice was dressed in a knee length black tunic with multicolored accents along the hem, matching leggings, and black shoes. She carried a black shawl in case it got chilly.

Skonn was dressed in his usual jeans, soft boots, long sleeved flannel shirt, and matching jean jacket.

Skonn escorted Janice to an Azotan eatery a short distance from the hotel. Janice couldn't read the characters on the sign that hung outside.

"It means rest stop," Skonn said in response to Janice's inquiring look.

They were quickly seated in a private booth and handed old fashioned menus.

"I will not, under any circumstances, allow you to order meat loaf, string beans, and mashed potatoes," Skonn warned.

"They probably don't even have that on the menu,"

Janice responded.

"You would be surprised at their abundance of intergalactic cuisine. I had an excellent bowl of plomek soup served with freshly baked kyna bread here last year," Skonn told her. "You should try something new," he suggested.

"Okay, I'm game. What do you suggest?"

"The Azotan Akri meal. It is one of their traditional dinner repast meals," Skonn told her as he put his menu down and signaled a server. The waiter hurried over, cleared their table, took Skonn's order, then hurried off. He returned a few minutes later with a pitcher of water, two bowls and two towels.

"We are supposed to wash our hands first, because Akri is assembled and eaten with one's hands." Skonn explained as he poured some water into each bowl and then washed his hands. Janice as she washed her hands as well. The server returned and removed everything. A few minutes later, he returned with their meals.

Janice gazed wide eyed as the waiter placed a lazy Susan tray on their table. The tray had four sections, one with pita like bread, another with shredded veggies, a third with shredded meats, and the fourth, a middle section with various sauces.

To demonstrate, Skonn started by taking a piece of bread. swiveling the tray clockwise to the shredded veggies, adding some to the middle of the bread, bypassing the meat, rolling the bread like a wrap, then dipping the end into one of the sauces and taking a bite.

"You can either use your fingers to add the ingredients or you can use the disposable tongs," he said before taking another bite.

Janice mimicked Skonn's example adding meat to her wrap as well. She dipped hers in the same sauce as he did.

"This is really good. It's mildly spicy," she said with a smile.

After Skonn and Janice finished, they were served a thick, savory stew. Skonn's excluded meat, while Janice's contained tasty shell fish.

"How much time do we have left?" Janice asked as they left the eatery.

"Three hours, thirteen minutes."

"Oh my, whatever shall we do?" Janice asked.

"Let's go for a walk," Skonn replied.

"Anywhere in particular?" Janice asked.

"The Azotan Night Market," Skonn suggested. "The Azotan year is fourteen months long. Every month contains at least one major holy day which is always cause for gift giving and celebration. One can always purchase everyday items during the day at regular stores and markets. However, if one requires something special, one must buy it at the Night Market. Also, one does not purchase items at the asking price. One must haggle with the shop owner over the price, or they will refuse to sell the item," he continued.

"Now, that sounds intriguing," Janice said as she draped her shawl about her shoulders and walked beside Skonn.

Fiction

Star Wars - Ashi's Shame

Ch. 7: Diffusing the Hostage Situation

by LTJG Ashinaga

The next morning arrived softly. Ashi woke up refreshed. For a few moments, he had to consider if what he had experienced last night was a dream or reality. It seemed so real. Still, he felt a disturbance in the force nearby. There was a problem at the spaceport and he needed to check it out.

After a quick journey through the forest, Ashi stood on a hill overlooking the spaceport. He was hidden among the trees but had a good vantage point to see what was happening. Elbor was a beautiful community in the mountains. It was surrounded on three sides by the taller, densely forested hills leading toward the snowy mountains. The fourth side was open and looked out across the Eastern Plains. The village had been a farming and trade community before space travel, now the large open expanse to the east provided a perfect landing area for ships.

Normally Elbor would be bustling with activity, but today it was filled with an uneasy quiet. There was a ship parked on their main landing pad. Ashi immediately recognized the ship as the one those that Rodian slavers used. "What are they doing here? What's going on?" Ashi rhetorically asked.

Master Roh's voice spoke in his ear, "Use the force. Let it guide you."

"Master Roh?" Ashi quickly turned around a few times but did not find his master near him. Though he did not see the ghostly visage of Roh, he was now certain he had seen him last night. He calmed down and closed his eyes. In his mind, he could sense the force all around him, the flow of it not unlike water running down a stream. He could sense the residents of Elbor, and the darker presence of the mercenaries. It wasn't telling him a lot. Then he saw them. A bunch of smaller people huddled together inside the slavers ship. They weren't dark, and they were obviously young Jahalans. Ashi opened his eyes and thought about this, "They aren't attacking, they already have the children. What are they doing?" Suddenly he realized what was going on, "They haven't taken them for the slave trade; they are holding them hostage." Now he knew that he had to get down there and free those children. They were bargaining tools of some nature and he had to find out why.

Pulling out a small scope he zoomed in to take a look at the raiders standing near the ship. He saw several different, brutish looking aliens, but only one Rodian. That must be the leader, the one who fled the planet after their last raid. Fortunately, Ashi had dispatched all the slavers that attacked their village, so

whoever flew off would not recognize him. He might be able to blend into the crowd to get closer.

He put his swords on his back with a strap that he tightened across his bare chest. Then he slung his bag over his back to hide the swords. If one looked close enough, they would see the blades, but at a distance, they weren't noticeable.

He found a nice, steep part of the hill he was on and softly skidded down toward the village. He jumped a few times to avoid hitting a tree or large rock but landed so that he made as little noise as possible. His natural feline talents for stealth were refined through Jedi training.

Ashi stopped behind large containers so as not to draw attention when he landed. He pressed his back up against a box when he saw a shadow coming closer, and it was holding a gun. The shadow stopped and casually looked around. Fortunately, whoever this was had not seen Ashi, but was merely pacing around.

That shadow got closer and suddenly a male Twi'Lek came around the corner and pulled his pants down slightly in order to relieve himself. He suddenly noticed the crouching Jahalan and pulled his gun. His pants nearly fell off, leaving his undergarments exposed. "Hey, what are you doing?"

Ashi calmly stood up and held his hand nearer the raiders face, "I'm hungry for some breakfast."

The Twi'lek lowered his gun, his eyes became glazed and he repeated, "I'm hungry for some breakfast."

Ashi continued, "I think I'll go eat."

"I think I'll go eat," The man repeated and then turned around.

Ashi used this distraction and dashed around the crates to get out of sight. The Twi'lek raider looked back and tried to remember what he had just been doing. He shrugged, slung his gun over his shoulder and finished pulling his pants down. As he wet the ground he muttered to himself, "Man, I'm hungry."

* * * * *

Ashi found a band of the Jahalan's that were seated on the ground waiting. They had a single warrior keeping them at bay. The long night spent sitting here was apparent on their faces and tails. Normally a Jahalan's tail is always moving, but when they are extremely tired it lays limp.

Keeping out of sight, Ashi listened with his tall ears and peaked around the corner of a building now and then. He finally saw an opening when the guard walked a different direction. Ashi slunk into the crowds and then lowered his head so to appear like the others. Most off-worlders think all Jahalan's look alike. The guard had turned to walk back as he paced in boredom. The ruse worked, the guard hardly noticed the extra person among his gathering.

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from Page 12)

When the guard turned away again Ashi looked for someone to help him. Most of the people were tired and worried, but one man was fighting back tears. He had cried last night, which was apparent by the wet fur on his face. Ashi quickly scooted closer to him and then lowered his head again. The guard made another pass and remained oblivious.

"Hey," Ashi whispered, "What's going on?"

The man sniffed and carefully looked up. "Who are you? You weren't here last night?"

"I'm here to help. But, I don't know what's going on." Ashi whispered.

They both stopped talking as the guard passed nearer to them.

"They have our children on their ship. They say they'll take them away and sell them as slaves if we don't hand over some Jedi they believe to be here." He held back his sobbing as he finished, "They also said if we do anything to revolt, they'll execute all the children."

Ashi softly gasped and then lowered his head again as the guard walked by.

"A Jedi? They specifically said Jedi? Why?" Ashi asked.

"I don't know." The man answered, "I thought the Jedi were all dead. Look, I'm just a farmer. My daughter and I bring in a load of mullwheat for trade. My wife is at the farm, I can't go home without our daughter." He was so distraught he almost broke out in tears again.

The guard heard this much and jabbed him with his gun, "Stop blubbering! You stupid cat, you've whined all night."

Ashi pushed the gun away as gently as he could, hopefully, to keep from provoking this man anymore. "Leave him alone. He's upset. Wouldn't you be?"

The strange blue alien sneered, "No. We don't have children on Bolus."

Ashi looked at the blue man and realized he was a Globulian from Bolus. "Oh."

"Hey, you weren't here last night. Where did you come from?" The Globulian thrust his gun in Ashi's face.

Ashi held up his hand, "You saw me last night."

The Globulian sneered, "What? Are you talking back you stupid cat."

"Damn." Ashi forgot that Globulians were resistant to mind tricks. He swiftly rolled away when the man shot his blaster. With a bounding leap, Ashi got to his feet directly behind the blue alien. He kicked the man in the back and the jumped up and twisted around for a second kick to his side. The Globulian slammed into the building nearby and then hit the ground.

The blaster skidded across the ground and was right in front of the distraught father. The man picked up the weapon. Just as the blue man got up to fight

Ashi, he shot him in the back.

Ashi was not prepared for this, he didn't intend to kill him. But, it did end the fight. He saw the terrified farmer sitting there, the blaster still in his hands. There was a look of horror written on his face.

"What...what have I done?" He dropped the blaster.

Ashi quickly came over and got the weapon. "You did what you had to. Thank you."

"No. Now they'll kill our children. What have I done?"

Ashi got to one knee and held the man's hand, "Listen. I'm the Jedi they're looking for. I've come to save you and your children. I'll free them before they get the chance. "

The people, still a bit confused about what had just happened, began to stand up and gather near Ashi. The man looked up into Ashi's eyes, "But, my daughter. She's inside their ship. How..."

"Let me figure this out. You..." he now addressed the group, "everyone, run. Get away from here. Don't let them see you. That will give them some confusion and buy me time." He looked up at a large, empty crate. "Move back," he ordered and stood up. He lifted both hands and used the force to lift the box, lowering it over the body, open side down. He covered the blue man and then pointed toward the forest. "Go. Let them be confused. I promise I'll get your children to safety and then deal with these bandits."

The people dashed away. A few stopped to say a quick thanks. The man who had shot the Globulian got to his feet and grabbed Ashi by the hand, "Save my daughter, please."

Ashi took his hand firmly, "I will." With that, the father left with the others.

Ashi got away and hid again, maneuvering himself toward the ship. If they had left with the body visible, the others would've known they had fled. But, with the body concealed, they might wonder where he had taken them. It wouldn't buy much time, but it would have to be enough.

Ashi slunk around corners and behind crates to avoid being seen by any of the mercenaries. He stopped behind a stack of boxes near the landing pad, looking around for the next hiding place closer to the ship. Unfortunately, there weren't any. Logically, it wasn't wise to stack boxes where ships would be landing, especially ships larger than this quick little raider.

The sun had risen for the day and now Ashi could see the town better. The large port area where people gathered to deliver or pick up goods was abnormally quiet. Crowds of Jahalans were gathered into groups and seated with an overseer pacing near them. The local security forces were all gathered in one place,

(Continued on page 14)

(Continued from Page 13)

Ashi finally saw the leader of this group. It was a Rodian with a darker blue/green skin. He wasn't carrying any visible weapons and did not have any hostages with him. Ashi counted nine other mercenaries, ten with the man who died. This Rodian wouldn't hire too many men, it would cost too much. He probably only had a few inside to watch the children. As a Jedi, it was his responsibility to preserve life where possible, even lawbreakers. Besides, the fewer the people he had to fight, the less attention it would grab. But, the Rodian commander was right in the middle of the port directly in front of his ship. If Ashi made a run for the extended ramp, this man was sure to see him.

A lucky break. The commander's attention was grabbed and he walked away. Ashi realized he was walking right toward where the group had been that he already freed. This meant they would be alerted to someone's presence. However, it gave Ashi freedom to move. He dashed to the extended ramp and got behind it before one of the others saw him. He even had to worry about the citizens; if they noticed him they could accidentally alert the mercenaries.

He found the workers access port on the bottom and slowly used the force to unscrew the hatch. It would lead into the small crawl space to work on the power systems, which would have an exit inside. He lowered the hatch to the ground as quietly as he could. He crouched low and focused his mind. Using the force again he jumped up right through the now open port hole. The whole time he didn't make one sound, his Jedi-training and feline skill working in tandem.

He found himself in a tight space that was just large enough to crawl through. It would lead him all the way to the front of the ship, from which he would have to double back to find the compartment where they were keeping the children hostage. With the open power conduits that were extremely hot, Ashi had to wrap his tail around his thigh to keep it from falling over the side and being burnt. It was going to be a long drag.

* * * * *

Drak and his Toydarain mercenary examined the area where the largest group of Jahalan's had been.

The little flying man hovered next to Drak. "See. I told you they was gone. I find no fight marks on anything."

Drak carefully examined the ground for any signs of struggle, especially considering it would take a whole group of cats to take down a Globulian. "What happened here? Where's Bort?"

The Toydarian flew up higher, "I no see him anywhere." Then the sneaky little man flew closer to Drak to quietly accuse his fellow mercenary. "Bort might take people to another village, extort money out of them."

"He wouldn't dare. The bounty we're after is much higher than anything he could...wait...what's that?" Drak noticed the box on the ground. Not the box, but what was coming out from under the side of it. There was an oozing pool of thick, blue liquid.

The Toydarian got lower and looked at the ooze, "It look like Globulian blood."

Drak knelt down and put his hand under the side of the box. It was empty, though a heavy box on its own, not too much to lift up. He pushed it up enough to see the body under it. Bort looked deflated and surrounded by this blue ooze. Globulians don't have blood, so they don't immediately bleed. However, when they die, they melt. Drak dropped the box back down, "Damn! He was one of the best shots on our team."

"Still, make no sense. Where his weapon? Where signs of struggle. I no like this. This stink of Jedi." The Toydarian looked around for any lightsaber marks on walls or boxes.

Drak nodded, "Yes. Our Jedi friend is here. And he has taken out our best sniper. Now, our problem is figuring out which one he is. All these cats look alike."

The Toydarian grunted, "Why not just kill them all, eh? We take all back to Empire, one is Jedi, we get money."

Drak scoffed, "Sure, we get the bounty for one man, and then thrown in prison for a thousand murders." He smacked the Toydarian in his leather helmet. "Think!"

The Toydarian rubbed his head, "Just a suggestion."

* * * * *

Hidden amongst the trees, on a hill nearby, the freed Jahalan's watched this exchange with fearful anticipation. They could hear some of the conversation with their sensitive ears, but not enough.

Stef, the father who shot Bort, couldn't hear over the pounding of his own heart. He was so worried about his daughter it ached. Now he became scared to death that the leader of this terrible band of murderers would lash out and kill the children. They warned the people not to revolt or the hostages would perish.

Stef got up but found a hand on his shoulder. A woman was holding him back. She whispered, "What are you doing?"

"It is taking that Jedi too long. He's not going to make it in time."

She pushed him back even more, "Give him more time. It's going just like he said, those raiders are confused and wasting time looking around. They still haven't even gone back to their ship. Besides, they gave us until tomorrow morning to turn in a Jedi."

Stef took her hand off of him, "I can't let them kill our children." He took up the rifle he still held and quietly made his way down the hill.

Brain Benders

ACROSS

1. Door fastener
6. Socked away
11. Dash lengths
14. Ere
15. Century plant
16. 8 pts.
17. "Dear sir or ___"
18. Automaton of Hebrew lore
19. Main mail ctr.
20. *Former NYPD detective
22. Exist
23. Slippery ___
24. Grind, as teeth
27. Two-track sound system
29. "Iliad" city
32. "So that's it!"
33. "___ the fields we go"
34. Dinghy propeller
35. Pepsi or RC
37. Wing skin fastener
41. Singles
43. *Captain of the 88th precinct
45. Astronaut's insignia
46. Plains tribe
48. Kind of palm
49. Deface
50. Province between Sask. and B.C.
52. Holiday quaff
53. Made, as cotton candy
54. Eye bank donation
57. Slur over
59. Bemoan
60. Recede
62. *Human female officer who dealt with a notorious bomber in her past

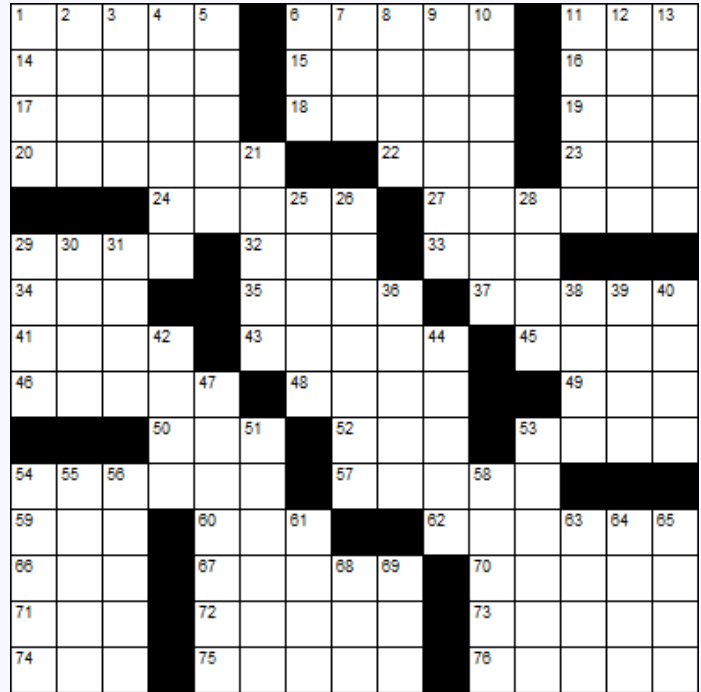
66. ___ Aquarids (May meteor shower)
67. Somewhat, slangily
70. ___ Vance Hammond: author of "Shoe Marks"
71. Peculiar
72. Nonsense
73. Change for the better
74. Dissenting votes
75. Common sprain site
76. Oboe and bassoon



DOWN

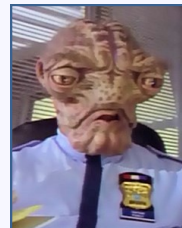
1. Follower of Mary
2. Way, way off
3. ___ list
4. Rugged, as a cliff
5. Hercules type
6. Give in to gravity
7. In the past
8. *Young alien girl conned into causing heart attacks among members of the Hydra Gang
9. Exceedingly
10. *The "D" in DCPD
11. Angry trick-or-treater, perhaps
12. Syrup sap source
13. *Precinct member with a Time Vector Generator and an unalterable memory
21. Civil rights org.
25. Chases away, as flies
26. *Partner if 20A
28. Town in Wellington County, Ontario
29. *Officer who nearly died from Xyron fever
30. Hindu royal
31. Hydrox rival
36. Star in Perseus
38. Theda Bara, e.g.
39. Jacob's brother
40. *Species with a discerning third eye
42. Ballet bird
44. Like some meditative exercises
47. *Killer of Oturi and others
51. Mandrill, for one
53. Big Bird's street
54. *Species with a wide view of things
55. Go one better than
56. Gets the mood of
58. Senegal's capital
61. *Masterminded the murder of Kalike (a Pyrist priest)
63. 23A or 12D, e.g.
64. What banks do
65. Means justifiers
68. ___ Aviv
69. Affirmative vote

ESB Crockett's Spirited Crossword Puzzle *Police Station Orbiting the Planet Altor by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa - March 2017



Answers to Previous Puzzle

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



More Brain Benders

SUDOKU PUZZLE

March 2017

Medium Non-Symmetrical

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to February's Sudoku Puzzle

Easy Non-Symmetrical

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

WORD SEARCH

March's Topic: Ted Shackelford Roles

Look for 27 character names

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to February's Word Search:

Martin Landau Roles

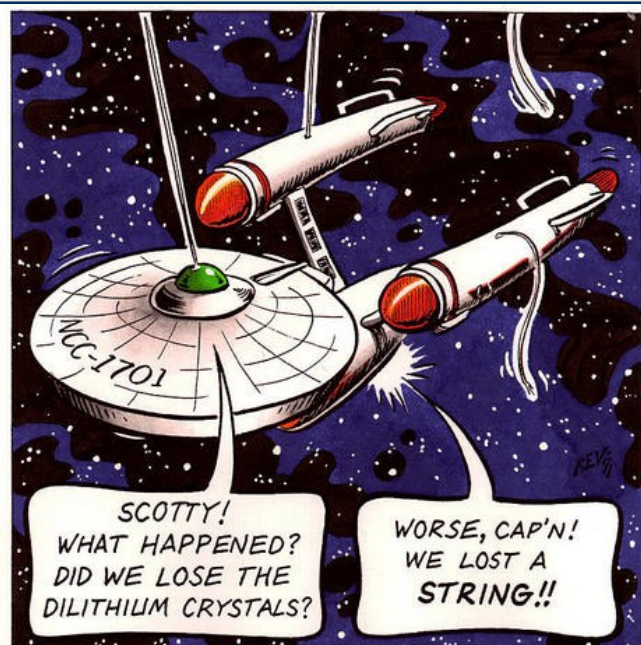
C	M	D	R	J	O	H	N	K	O	E	N	I	G	J
T	O	M	F	L	O	O	D	E	R	U	F	I	O	E
J	A	M	E	S	V	Y	M	A	L	V	A	N	I	S
P	R	O	L	L	I	N	H	A	N	D	S	U	L	S
A	L	D	R	A	K	E	V	S	T	O	N	E	Y	E
U	P	R	E	A	C	H	E	R	H	C	L	K	C	
L	C	I	C	E	R	O	D	V	E	J	O	E	L	O
S	B	O	B	F	O	R	D	I	D	C	R	R	L	E
A	N	D	R	O	A	I	N	R	U	D	T	I	P	D
V	M	K	C	N	V	R	A	N	K	I	N	Y	U	N
A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

Brain Benders

Word Search

March's Word List:

Adam	Les Larson
Barnes	Lt. Brogan
Blain	Magrover
Boone	Mark Gage
Carlisle	Mesmerizer
Dr. Delafield	Moonstar
Ed Joblansky	Paul Kohler
Eddie	Pendl
Eric Genter	Preston McMillan
Garret	Ray Gordon
Gary Ewing	Rev. Brewster
Jerry	Steve Ennis
Jim	Tom Webb
John Hix	



Esprit Starbase & Crockett's Spirit Staff

Maj. Gen. J. Tanner
Starbase Commander

Brig. Gen. Drego Tensa
Starbase Vice Commander
Editor, Crockett's Spirit

CDRE Logan Kale
Starbase Executive Officer

CAPT Y'Wanna
Chief, ESB Recreations

CAPT Shayle Carter
Deputy Chief, ESB Recreations
Entertainment Section Leader

Simm Team Leader
Trivia Host
Staff Writer

CAPT Two Wolves
Senior Staff Writer

Col. Shreya Rose
Staff Writer

CMDR Bond
Security Officer

Capt Wynan
Senior Staff Writer

LTJG Ashinaga
Staff Writer

Dennis Howard
Editorial Writer

Critic

Crockett's Spirit is a publication created and distributed for the entertainment, education and informational use of its members. All statements and articles herein are the opinions of the authors and in no way are to be considered official statements of the Esprit Starbase command staff or its commander. Additionally, all works of original fiction printed and published herein are done so with the express permission of the authors and are the sole property of those authors with all rights of copy reserved to them.