



Crockett's Spirit

Impavidus Scribere Veritas — The Brave Write the Truth



Volume 5 Issue 4




April 2017

ESB News & Happenings

by Brig. Gen. Drego Tensa

Here's What's been Happening at ESB:

Promotions:

Rank Earned	Stardate	Officer
CAPT 	042817	Bond
LT 	042817	Ashinaga
LTJG 	042817	Star Eagle

Assignments:

Position	Stardate	Officer
Pubs: Staff Writer	042817	LTJG Star Eagle

Acknowledgement

We here at ESB are exceedingly fortunate in that we have a writing staff that's second to none. We have a total of six fiction writers, all good, four of whom write full time for Crockett's Spirit, which is to say that those four have had a story segment or chapter published continually, month after month, without interruption, from the very first issue their work appeared in. Also, these four have an unusual distinction: they all have had works of their own published commercially. The sci-fi and fantasy stories they are writing for Crockett's spirit are nothing short of excellent. So, CAPT Two Wolves, Capt Wynan, LT Ashinaga and LTJG Star Eagle, I salute you!

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Fiction

The Alfore Encounter - 43

"The Night Market"

by CAPT Two Wolves

Captain Wekk entered the small living area that was the Dionysus' VIP quarters and found everyone pretty much settled in for the evening. K'Tal introduced everyone to the captain.

After an hour Wekk found herself holding Victoria, who was wide awake and staring with unabashed curiosity at the dark skinned lady holding her.

"And how old is she, again?" Wekk asked.

"Ten days," Tony and Shara replied simultaneously.

"She already looks like she wants to talk." Wekk observed as she carefully handed Victoria back to her Mother. She clung to Shara but gazed back at Wekk.

"She really likes you," Tony said.

"Likewise. She's very well behaved for one so young," Wekk replied.

"That's due to the fact that she has a full stomach and is ready for a nap," Shara told her. She then excused herself and took Victoria to one of the bedrooms so she could rest.

"I see you've brought quite the menagerie. What are these called?" Wekk asked, referring to the felines and the fox-like canines that surrounded them.

"These are Alforian Track Cats. They are native to Alfore One which is an ice planet. The natives use them in the same manner as Earth's Eskimos use Huskies. Only the Track Cats are intelligent, telepathic, and use echolocation to find their way through the snow fields," Tony explained. "And these little guys are called Greya," he continued, pointing to the fox like

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creatures that sat next to him. "They were, for a long time, considered pest. I discovered during our stay, however, that they are actually quite intelligent and have a limited vocabulary."

"I heard that after your ship crashed you were rescued by the Alfore people. That must have been a very interesting experience," Wekk said scratching KiKi under her chin. She was clearly enjoying the attention and laid her head on the captain's knee, eyes closed in utter rapture.

Rusty, had claimed K'Tal's knee and was receiving the same treatment.

"Yes, it was an interesting experience. However, I just want us to get on with our lives. It looks like that's not going to be for a while yet," Tony lamented.

"I know what you mean. We are currently five days away from Vulcan, so please try to relax and enjoy the trip. You have full run of the ship, the gym, holo deck, just stay away from the brig," Wekk said, then rose to her feet.

"Captain Wekk?" Jessica piped up. "May I have a tour of the ship?" she asked boldly, as Marisol tried in vain to shush her.

"Of course you may," Captain Wekk replied. "How about tomorrow at 1000 hours?"

"What does 1000 hours mean?" Jessica asked.

"That is military time. In Starfleet we use the twenty four hour clock instead of saying AM or PM. We continue on from noon with 1300 hours for one o'clock," Wekk explained.

"So, how do you say midnight, 2400 hours?" Jessica asked.

"Well, old school MACO warriors say oh-dark-hundred. But, if you want to be technical, the Starfleet manual of standard military conduct says 0000 hours," Wekk told her regarding the typical Starfleet rookie mistake. Then she said, "I must bid everyone adios for now. I will be back to collect you tomorrow morning at 1000 hours sharp. Ms. Gomez, you are welcome to accompany your granddaughter and me as well," Wekk added as she and K'Tal departed.

"Now, to the brig," Wekk said as they approached the lift.

"Do you really want to go there now?" the Klingon woman asked.

"Absolutely not, but I felt the need to talk myself into it," Wekk said in response.

"Just to let you know, you might need a mug of Klingon War Nog after this encounter," K'Tal warned.

"That bad, eh?" Wekk asked.

"It makes my blood boil every time I lay eyes upon that harridan, T'Pell." K'Tal rumbled.

"Pity, my morning affirmation was not to be angry today," Wekk remarked which caused K'Tal to howl with mirth.

After an hour of strolling through the Night Market, which stretched for miles, Janice and Skonn turned aside into a colorfully decorated shop where they were beacons in by one of the shop's proprietors.

It was a Yte shop. The Yte was the traditional three piece garment worn by the Azo women. Janice stood amazed at all of the beautiful bright colors and varying patterns of the same outfit.

"Esposa?" the female asked of Skonn, totally shocking Janice.

"Amiga," Skonn replied. He gave Janice the "I'll explain later" look.

"Come and try one on," the shop keeper who introduced herself as Jihm coaxed.

"Ugh, I hate having to get undressed and redressing," Janice said, as she reluctantly removed and handed her shawl to Skonn.

"There is no need to undress if you don't want to. Come stand here," Jihm said, as she guided Janice to stand on a slightly raised pedestal. Jihm then sat down behind a desk that had a large monitor. "Hold still please," she said after several clicks. "Alright, come and see."

Jihm had tilted the monitor lengthwise to accommodate Janices height. Janice sat next to her and watched her holo image on the screen.

"Now, what colors do you like?"

"Dark blue." Janice replied.

"Dark blue is too dark for your skin tone, but, we will try," Jihm stated. She touched a button and Janice watched the computer dress her in a dark blue Yte complete with a head covering that was artfully draped around shoulders instead of merely covering her head.

"You were right. Blue is too darned dark for me. Let's try green." Janice said, getting into the swing of things.

"And you don't have to try one on unless you really like the color and style," Jihm assured her.

One hour and forty five minutes later, Janice had purchased five Yte, with the help of Skonn's expense account. Since Janice had no clue how it worked, Skonn had done all of the bargaining for the final price.

"Oh my, what am I going to do with all of these bags?" Janice wondered aloud, as she watched Jihm's sister carefully fold each outfit in tissue

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and place them into separate shopping bags. She had completely forgotten to bring her portable antigrav shopper.

"You need not carry them, Lady. Tell us your hotel and we will have the packages delivered directly. You can pick them up, when you return to your rooms. No extra charge," Jihm replied helpfully.

"Excellent idea! Thank you!" Janice said.

"Glad to be of service," Jihm replied as they departed. "Please come again. The address and call code numbers are on the bags. And, we ship intergalactically," she called after them.

"Where to now? We've got about an hour left, right?" Janice asked.

"One hour, fifteen minutes and twenty five seconds," Was Skonn's reply as they strolled along with the crowds. Janice chuckled and rolled her eyes.

"Wait, now that looks interesting" Janice said, stopping dead in her tracks. Skonn's eyebrows ascended high on his forehead at what she had found interesting, a teepee like tent sitting off to the side. The hand painted sign read "Prophet".

"Most likely that individual is a charlatan and thief," Skonn warned.

"If the sign said palm reader or had a crystal ball or tarot cards pictured, I'd be inclined to agree with you, Skonn, but not this time. I've encountered prophets in the past. They don't take money for their predictions. In fact, they encourage you to pay it forward when their predictions come true," Janice said as she strode towards the tent's entrance. Skonn reluctantly followed.

Janice rang the chime at the tent's door and stooped down to enter. Skonn ducked in after her. Inside, the tent was well lit. The "prophetess" sat cross legged on a large brocaded pillow and smiled at them. She was surrounded by holy books from around the galaxy, but the Bible was sitting open in her lap. She carefully marked her place, closed it and stood. That's when they both noticed she was a human dwarf of East Indian decent, dressed in a white sari like garment.

"Welcome, welcome, welcome." she said. "Esposa?" she asked Skonn, illiciting identical frowns from both.

"Oh, poor things," she chuckled politely. "You don't believe you were made for each other?" Two stone faces stared back at her.

"I am Malili, by the way. Come, sit, and have some tea," she said, as she busied herself with brewing the drink from scratch.

Minutes later both Janice and Skonn sat cross legged on pillows and sipped spicy tea from large mugs.

"Now, what do you wish me to predict? Malili asked. I've already made a significant onethough," she added with a smile.

"I'll make my decision after I finished this tea," Janice stated. She was looking into Malili's eyes over the rim of her mug.

"Of course. There's plenty of tea and plenty of time," the prophetess replied, meeting Janice's steely gaze.

Fiction

The Vanthean Chronicles: Tyranny's Dawn—Book 1

by LTJG Star Eagle

THREE: RANIB

RANIB WAS ABOUT to be hanged. Five nooses dangled from the gallows, and five men stood abreast. Ranib was number four. He peered at the three men to his left. They all wore the rags that their clothes had become since being locked up. The first two had dark, disheveled hair. The third man was bald. The first man was dark in color, but the other two had the same olive complexion as Ranib. The second man, in his thirties, was darting his eyes about and looked as though he were ready to break down. The third man, in his fifties, gave Ranib a scowl. Then he smiled maliciously, as if somehow content that no one else up here would escape the same fate that was in store for him. The first man, though simply gazed out to the east, past the executioner and the judge, past the courtyard with its myriad peoples, past the desert oasis of Sukhar-Halesh, and even past the great desert wastes and the mountains beyond. He seemed to be gazing at the mid-morning sun. The Sacred Night was over; now the sun lay in the sky just to the right of the great planet Shi-ar'kun. The gas giant's twin great purple storms resembled two eyes looking down in contempt upon this group of men, this day. It was still close enough to the sun that the emanating light was softer and dimmer than normal, as though the entire day had been cast in twilight.

Ranib knew why the man was staring so intently. This was the last glimpse of the sun that the dark man, that any of them, would ever see. He wanted an image of something new again, good and perfect, before he died.

He looked to the man to his left. This man was younger than Ranib, in his twenties. He had tears in his eyes that trailed into his beard. He slowly turned his head to Ranib.

"Ranib," he began, "I thank you. When the others beat me, you brought me food. You were always kind. May the gods forgive whatever you have done, Ranib. May they look down upon us both with mercy."

"I never asked you your name," replied Ranib, embarrassed that he had found out so much about this man, but never his name.

"Jibral," the young man replied.

Indeed, Ranib knew much about Jibral, who had murdered his betrothed and the man she had been in bed with when Jibral found them both. It was a crime of passion, but to the lawgivers and judges it made no

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difference.

Ranib was arrested for stealing horses. In fact, he had not stolen any horses. He had, in fact, stolen money, clothes and food. He had gotten drunk and assaulted people. He drank too much wine and had his way with a young woman more than once. For any of these crimes Ranib was guilty. For this particular crime, however, he had simply been the most convenient person to accuse. With his death, the illusion of justice would prevail, and order would be maintained. Ranib knew what was really going on.

"Jibral..." he paused, "We've all done bad things. Does that mean that we are bad? Only the gods know for sure, but...I do not believe so." He looked to the other three men, and then he turned back to his friend. "If you and I have done more good than bad...we will be alright."

He brushed his curly black hair out of his brown eyes and let the sun shine into them. He was trying to decide if he was ready or if he was going to panic. He had to accept this, right now. He had to. The only thing left for him was to stifle the fear and put his faith into the words he had spoken to his friend.

The judge, in an ornate black robe and tunic, looked down upon them all from some thirty feet away. Though Ranib and his fellows stood on trapdoors ten feet above the ground, and the nooses were hanging from ten feet above them, the judge stood on a cedar tower some fifteen feet high. Two archers stood behind him in woven wicker, ready to strike any man who tried to run or who failed to die from the noose.

"Since the Sacred Night is over," began the judge, his voice echoing throughout the courtyard, "your sentencing can now commence." He gave a nod to the masked man who was standing near the dark man. This figure, wearing an ebony mask that had only two holes for eyes, put the noose around the dark man and made sure the noose was tight. He then came to the second man—the panicky one—and lifted the noose to put it around his neck.

"Nooo!" exclaimed the man, jumping from the gallows to the ground below. The executioner tried to catch him, but failed. He landed off-kilter; everyone could hear the sickening snap of his femur breaking. He screamed out from pain and shock. The screaming turned to yelling as anguish and frustration overtook the pain. Sitting on the ground, he put his arms out to protect his head. "I am innocent!" he cried. "I do not deserve this! I do not!"

Four arrows pierced his body within a second, preventing him from saying anything else. The two archers immediately reloaded.

Any thought to Ranib of escaping was now quelled. He had no choice. He watched as some dogs, let loose by spectators in the crowd, ran over to the dead man and started tearing at his flesh.

The executioner slipped the nooses on the remaining men, one by one, making sure their knots were tight. He then returned to the first man's place, to the trapdoor lever behind him. Finally, he gave a single nod to the judge.

"Martesh, you are guilty of spreading dissent," began the judge. "You are sentenced to die, here and now. Speak, if you will."

The dark man said nothing. He slowly shook his head once. The first lever was pulled, and he fell down. His neck was instantly broken as he dropped. Now he simply dangled in the air.

"Onar, you are guilty of raping and killing the family you had worked many years for. You are also guilty of stealing their goods and burning down their property to hide you despicable crimes. You are sentenced to die, here and now. Speak, if you will."

The bald man grinned. He then spit at the judge. The executioner pulled the third lever, and soon he, too, was a dangling dead man.

Please let it be quick, Ranib thought to himself. He looked directly at the judge, into his stern eyes and at the lines in his face. His dark hair was graying, even in his beard and mustache. Ranib wondered how much death this man had seen, whether his death would make any difference to this man...or to the world, for that matter. He then looked to the sun, as the first man had done.

"Ranib, you are guilty of stealing the prince's horses. You are sentenced to die, here and now. Speak, if you will."

"I forgive you. You are only doing your duty," Ranib said. He was immediately surprised by his own words. Jibral looked to him with shock in his eyes. His expression softened after a second.

The executioner pulled the lever. Ranib felt the cedar planks give way beneath him. He felt his body falling as the rope became taut. Then, he felt the noose slip a bit as it wrapped around his neck. He began to choke; instead of breaking his neck, the faulty noose was now strangling him to death.

His eyes bulged as he gasped for precious breath, the instinct of any living being. The archers drew their bows back, but the judge raised his hand. He was waiting to see what would happen, whether the noose could still suffocate him.

Ranib twitched. He looked out, past all of this. He could no longer breathe. He began to lose consciousness, but something caught his eye. Everything and everyone around him was now very faintly translucent. All living things—people, animals and plants—also glowed very softly. He looked to the judge, then to the archers, and finally to the spectators. He realized that though people were looking at him, they couldn't really see him. He then looked to the sun, which had golden rays of light emanating in waves all around it, like ripples from a pebble thrown into the water.

This is when he first saw the spirits. They were floating in midair, very quickly coming closer to him. He saw fourteen in all, roughly humanoid in shape. Most of them were a translucent gray, except for one spirit behind them all, which was completely black. In fact, it appeared to Ranib to be the complete absence of light.

Terror overtook him. He wanted to run away, but he could barely move...and they kept coming closer. He

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looked to where the first man had been. His spirit was floating toward the sun, his arms outstretched as if to welcome it. His spirit got suddenly very bright, and then it disappeared.

The second man's spirit got up from his seated position. He looked around, confused, and then ran off as fast as he could. He ran through people, and through the walls, heading to the wilderness.

The third man's spirit, a dark gray figure, looked at Ranib and gave him a toothy grin, still dangling from the gallows. His form became wispy as he left his body and levitated above the ground. He moved closer to Ranib. "So this is death," he said, his voice now chilling. "It's not so bad, really. At least for me. I think I'm going to eat your soul now," it grinned again, its teeth now turning into fangs.

"No, you bastard!" whispered Ranib.

The fourteen spirits now descended upon them, standing between Ranib and the judge's tower. One of them stretched out an arm and spoke a single word that Ranib did not recognize. It echoed through the courtyard as a beam of black light shot from it, hitting the spirit of Onar and disintegrating it. It shrieked as it disappeared.

Ranib looked at them, terrified. "What are you?" he whispered.

"We are your saviors," they replied simultaneously.

"But I am already dead," he protested. "Please, just let me go so I can journey to the land of the dead," he asked.

"You are not yet dead, Ranib," they responded. "You are now between the worlds, seeing all things as they truly are."

Ranib looked around again. Now, everything was almost completely still, moving only at a snail's crawl.

"Time is meaningless now," they said, as if they could read his mind. "If you do as we ask, then you shall live. In fact, you shall never need be afraid again."

"What must I do?" asked Ranib suspiciously.

"We have power in this world, but not in yours," they replied. "If you accept us into yourself, then our power shall be made manifest in both worlds."

Ranib's childhood fables suddenly came back to him, tales of men and women who had become possessed by an evil spirit or a demon because of some foolish bargaining.

"I will not let you possess me," he told them.

"Then your only alternative is oblivion," they answered, coldly.

Ranib laughed. "But the spirit obviously lives on. I am no longer afraid of death."

The spirits drew closer, close enough to whisper—if a spirit could whisper. "Do you truly think there are no fates that are worse than death? What about eternal torment? What about wandering this world forever as a lost soul, eventually going mad? What about nothingness? Yes, that is what we did to your twisted companion."

The black spirit moved to the front of the group. It came right up to Ranib and stuck out a finger-like tendril to his forehead.

Ranib's terror now turned to horror. The spirit put every fearful thought imaginable to Ranib. He saw what these beings were, where they had come from, what they had done to create and enforce a perfect order based on the tyranny of fear. Ranib screamed.

The black spirit pulled away from Ranib as the others pulled back toward him. Each one of them put out a tendril to him. Other sensations filled him—lust, greed, hatred, pride, a host of emotions assaulting his spirit all at once. Behind each one, however, lay the faintest trace of fear.

"Stop," ordered Ranib. They consented. He looked at them, trying desperately to make up his mind. "I will need to stay in control," he insisted.

"We shall only take control when it is necessary," they answered.

"Alright," replied Ranib. "You may enter."

"We shall return you to the world of the living," they said, "but then you must tell the people what we tell you to say. Then, and only then, will our bond be complete."

Ranib started choking again. He was still somewhat between worlds; he could no longer see the spirits, but he could hear them. They told him the first thing to say. He regained his voice.

"There is but one god, Ahnun, the one true creator."

The judge frowned. "That's enough." The archers readied their bows.

"Ahnun has made me His Foreseer to speak His word," he continued.

"Silence!" ordered the judge. Four arrows flew toward Ranib but were mysteriously deflected.

"His word is that we must turn from false gods and their lies. Turn to the law and be saved from an eternity of wandering the world as lost souls. Be saved from torment and despair."

The spectators heard him. Some of them whispered their questions. This was truly a unique event.

"Fire again!" yelled the judge. The archers fired, but their arrows had the same effect as before.

"The law is truth, the law is life, the law is power," exclaimed Ranib, now at the top of his voice, which began to echo. "The law is victory."

The executioner walked down the gallows stairs and drew his sword. It was black and flat at the tip, since it was an executioner's blade.

As he headed toward Ranib, the spirits entered him. Immediately they were confronted by the forces of physical existence—flesh, weight, gravity, the need for air and blood, and all the sensations that come from experiencing reality through a physical form. Overwhelmed at the onslaught of sensations, they began to panic; they were unprepared for this, despite their every desire for it.

Ranib felt their anxiety. "You must trust me," he told them. "Be calm. Let me guide you through your incarnation. You are beset by flesh and bone and blood, by what you can perceive with your eyes and ears and hands. Tell me your desires, and I will help you fulfill them," he assured. Within seconds, he had his answer.

Ranib's irises turned from brown to black, and his

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pupils turned white. He raised his eyes up toward the rope above him, which immediately snapped as though it had been cut with a white-hot blade. The executioner raised his sword to cleave Ranib, but he—or now, the Foreseer—waved his hand horizontally in front of him, speaking an unrecognizable word which echoed loudly.

As if hit by a giant lateral lathe, the executioner split into two, blood and bones and intestines falling out along his stomach, the center of the attack. Both parts of his body fell to the ground.

People in the crowd screamed. The judge ordered his archers to fire. The Foreseer, however, had other plans. It turned from the executioner's remains to face the archers, pointing out its fingers in a “v” pattern from its arms. It then motioned them toward each other. The two archers pointed their arrows at one another and released them, hitting each other in the neck and an eye. Both fell out of the tower, dead.

“Behold the power of the one true god!” the Foreseer exclaimed. The crowd was apoplectic. Some of them came forward to attack while others fled the courtyard. Still, a few others slowly crept forward, almost entranced by what they were experiencing.

“Ranib, please stop what you are doing.” It was the voice of Jibral, still standing with his noose around his neck. The Foreseer turned back to look at him.

“I was kind to you...and you were kind to me,” said the Foreseer, as if trying to remember who Jibral was. In taking over Ranib's body, the spirits now had access to his mind—all his memories, thoughts, feelings and nightmares.

Now, becoming accustomed to this new existence, the spirits turned on him. They took control completely away from him, removing his consciousness from his active mind and imprisoning it between somewhere deep within his subconscious—a place of fleeting dreams and nightmares—and the barest level of perception.

Ranib was screaming from somewhere deep inside himself. No one could hear him, no one but the spirits, who were very busy keeping him in his place. Ranib was almost in a dreamlike state now, though he could experience everything that these spirits—these usurpers—were doing with his body. He begged them not to kill Jibral, or anyone else, for that matter. All of them were now working as one, one from many, as the Foreseer.

“Jibral,” started the Foreseer, “do not be afraid. Be free,” it said, burning Jibral's rope in the same fashion as it had burned its own. It then levitated its friend down to its side. Jibral touched it and then pulled back his hand. The Foreseer smiled. “I am real. I am your friend. I need you to be my advisor. Can you do this?”

“By the gods—no, I mean, by Ahnun, I will try my hardest,” he replied. He got down upon his knees.

The Foreseer pulled him back up. “Do not worship me! You must only worship the one true god. He is beyond all likenesses of man, and no graven image shall be made of him.” Their intricate plan was predicated on people believing wholeheartedly in a perfect idea that could not make mistakes or disappoint, rather than a

flawed man who could. The people would still give these beings their faith, and therefore their power, for their host would be the face of this perfect idea nonetheless.

It suddenly felt fatigue, the loss of power. It had used much of its power to kill those men. Using spiritual or magickal energy in a physical world had physical effects. Then, however, it perceived another energy by which it could restore itself—the addictive emotional energy of fear. It came unfettered from the crowd, even from Jibral, and of course, the judge. Yet other emotions emanated from people as well—curiosity and, oddly enough, hope. These too could feed the Foreseer, but they were not as pleasurable as the most powerful emotion there. It fed off the fear and was nourished.

It looked up toward the judge, who was now descending the wooden tower's ladder. He was shaking as he approached the Foreseer.

“I should give you the same fate you gave to these men,” said the Foreseer, gazing at the judge intently.

“Please, Foreseer; don't you remember that you forgave me, that you knew that I was only keeping the laws of our city and our land?”

The Foreseer remembered. “Yes...I did forgive you. You are a lawgiver, are you not?” he asked.

“Yes, my lord. I am whatever you need me to be,” responded the judge, bowing before the Foreseer for mercy.

“Now there is a new law, the law of Ahnun. Will you now pledge to enforce this holy and perfect law?”

“With all my heart, I swear it!”

“What is your name, lawgiver?”

“Evor L'rahk, my lord,” replied the judge.

“Then rise, Evor L'rahk,” responded the Foreseer, “for you are now my chief high priest.”

The former judge refused to rise. Instead, he looked up at his new master. “How shall I begin, my lord?”

The Foreseer thought for a brief moment. It looked around to the crowd, to all the souls that had gathered here to see just what would happen next. “You must go forth and make believers out of any and all that cross your path. You must tell them the Four Truths and then ask them the Four Questions.”

“It shall be done,” responded L'rahk, rising slowly, since he didn't yet know what the “Four Questions” were.

“Gather fierce warriors as your vanguard,” continued the Foreseer. “Any who oppose you, any who refuse the truth of what you know and you have seen today, must be destroyed. Do you understand?”

L'rahk's eyes widened, but just for a second. He would never say “no” to a man who had just sliced his guards in half by will alone. “Yes, my lord; I understand perfectly. I shall do as you say.”

The Foreseer smiled. “Good,” it said. “The more people who believe, the more Ahnun's power shall grow, until at last he shall make this world anew.”

The crowd came even closer. Some reached out their hands to touch him. The Foreseer smiled again, peering into the distance, beyond this mere space and time, beyond all this to the possibility of what could—and would—be. “A good beginning,” it said.

Fiction

Fallen Angel - Part 39

by Capt Wynan

Boomer stumbled around the dark forest trying to retrace their steps back to where they had found the glowing crystals. The sliver of moon up in the sky did little to light the darkened forest floor. Roots and low growing plants grabbed at his feet, tangling about them and causing him to fall time and time again. By the time he found the camp they had fled from he was covered in cuts and scratches, his hands raw from falling countless times.

With shaking hands, he sat down on the log by the cold fire pit.

"I will rest a minute. I have to find those crystals. They will help her feel better," Boomer said out loud. With tears streaming down his face he looked up at the stars and let out a sob.

"Please, I don't know who to ask or how, but if there is something out there, please help my little girl be alright," Boomer pleaded to the night sky.

He buried his head in the crook of his arm and sobbed. He hated feeling so helpless and feared he would lose his little girl. He hadn't even known how to be a dad until she had come along. Since Lillian had come into his life he had felt a love for her he couldn't quite explain. The thought of losing her caused physical pain as if his heart were being ripped from his chest.

Boomer sat there for what seemed like only moments when a hand gently touched him on his shoulder.

"Boomer, what are you doing out here?" Captain Moore asked softly.

Hastily Boomer wiped his face with his shirt tail and stood up. "Sorry sir. I...I wanted to find those crystals Lillian was looking for, the ones that saved us when we crash landed here. They glow in the dark. She was picking them up when she fell into the quicksand. I thought she might like to have them when she woke up," Boomer said shifting from one foot to the other.

Kroll came out of the darkness carrying a few of the crystals in his hand. They did indeed glow softly in the night. The big native took a backpack off his shoulder and slipped the crystals inside.

"Well, I suggest we round up as many of these as we can, without falling into quicksand, and head back to the compound. Lillian will be happy to see those and you when she wakes up," The captain said.

Boomer let out a sigh of relief. He had feared the captain would have ripped into him royally for going off on his own like he did, but he didn't.

The three men walked into the forest, following the trail of glowing crystals, picking them up, placing them into the backpack until it was almost daylight, and the bag was full. There were still many scattered through-

out the forest but with the sun lightening the horizon they figured they should head back.

Boomer was physically exhausted and emotionally drained but he felt much better with the silent Kroll and Captain Moore there with him. Together they all walked back to the compound where the morning chores were just being finished as they entered the gate. The aroma of breakfast being cooked wafted on the morning breeze causing three stomachs to growl rather loudly. Kroll, Boomer and Moore stopped a moment, looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"I think we need to eat before we resume our duties here," Moore said as he slapped each man on the back, gently leading them to where Professor Pearson sat at the morning fire cooking breakfast.

The three men accepted the plates offered them and sat down on logs placed around the campfire. Boomer ate hungrily, finishing first. He passed his plate back to the professor, thanked him for the good food and turned to Kroll and Moore, "Thank you for helping me find these crystals. It really means a lot to me."

"Here take them and go sit with Lillian. You can clean them. At least it will give you something to do while you sit with her and Angel," Captain Moore said.

Kroll just looked at the young man and nodded his head. Boomer felt they understood more than he had realized. Taking the bag full of crystals, he turned and left for the medicine hut, walking quickly..

Opening the door quietly, he looked in and saw both Lillian and Angel resting on cots next to each other. Plants were intertwined over both of their bodies still. Boomer slipped in and walked softly to a chair on the far side of the two beds. With a rag in hand, a bristle brush and the bag of crystals he sat down and picked out a crystal and began cleaning it. He worked quietly and sat each crystal he had cleaned on the bed next to the small child. In the dimly lit room the crystals gave off a soft light. The plants did not shy away. In fact, they seemed to enjoy the light given off by the crystals.

A few hours later, Henderson softly opened the door to check on Angel and Lillian. He could see Boomer slumped in his chair and numerous, softly glowing crystals placed in a ring around the child. Henderson let out a soft sigh, "Finally, he has fallen asleep." He turned and walked back outside just as Captain Moore walked up to him.

"How are they doing?" Moore asked.

"Well, Boomer is finally sleeping and I think Angel and the little one will be alright. They actually have some color in their faces and look to be resting more comfortably," Henderson said as they walked across the compound.

"That is some good news to hear. And how is the rocket coming?"

"The rocket is almost ready, Captain. Soon we should be able to launch it and, if luck decides to be with us, send a message to Jaxon."

"Good. I'm ready to be back out among the stars again," Captain Moore said, rubbing his hands together.

Fiction

Star Wars - Ashi's Shame

Ch. 8: Saving the Children

by LT Ashinaga

Ashi stopped at the end of the long workers chute. He had crawled the entire extent of the ship on his belly and now lay on his back looking up at the hatch. He pressed a button and the hatch opened. He caught the door before it could swing hard and make a lot of noise.

Peeking through the tiny opening in the hatch, he looked to see that no one was in this area of the ship. Slowly letting the door open up, he crawled out and got to his feet. He stopped and brushed his fur off from all the dirt and dust he had gathered.

"Don't those slavers ever clean their ship?" He muttered as he brushed even more stuff out of his mane. It didn't take him long to realize that one of the ship's crew was a reptilian species that obviously had been shedding his skin. The very thought made him shudder.

His dusting was cut short by the sound of voices. He heard whimpering noises from deep in the holds. The children were there. He pulled out his swords and crouched a little lower. Walking forward he made almost no noise with each step. The Jahalan foot was naturally designed for stealth. Each step was taken precisely and with a slight spreading motion of his toes. He wore no shoes, Jahalan's do not need them with their rough feet.

To his amazement, the ship was devoid of others. He didn't see another mercenary anywhere as he walked through the corridors. They must be very sure of themselves to not defend their ship, or they didn't have enough men to keep the town occupied and watch the ship. One thing was certain, someone or something would be guarding the door where the children were being retained.

He stopped in a hall and heard the children again, they were in a room under him. Lifting up a floor panel he jumped down into the corridor below. Two assassin droids were stationed just outside a room. Ashi quickly slunk around a corner before their many watchful eyes caught him.

"Damn! They're droids." He cursed knowing that he couldn't use a mind trick to get passed them.

He had to come up with a plan now. He could deal with one easily, it's the second that would be the problem. If he had any more confidence in his abilities he would be able to deal with both at once, but he wasn't sure of himself.

Ashi got low and peaked around the corner. He held up one hand and focused his mind on the force. He gripped the droid which got its attention. It beeped loudly and both scanned quickly for intruders. With a thrust of his hand, the droid was thrown against the far bulkhead. He then slammed it back against the wall it had been standing beside. One last throw and he sent it slamming through a dangerous force field that vaporized it. He did miss his hopeful second objective, he never threw it into

the second droid, but it wasn't for lack of trying.

"Hold!" The droid robotically barked and pulled two guns with its appendages. Its large, conical head swiveled around with the many red dot eyes watching every move. It shot at Ashi's location, but the Jedi jumped out of the way three times.

Ashi dodged blast after blast, bouncing off of walls and flipping through the air. He landed in the middle of the corridor and used his swords to deflect two shots directed at him. With lightsabers, he could reflect the blasts right back at the shooter, but with these swords, he didn't have that kind of control.

Crouching low, he dashed at the robot. Deflecting more blasts, he finally got to it and took off one metal arm with a single swipe. Of course, this did not stop the droids attacking. It punched with another appendage while still trying to fire. Ashi dodged some attacks, deflected others, and lashed out at the droids head. A well-placed slam hit Ashi in the shoulder and he tumbled to the ground. Rolling left and right he continued dodging weapons fire. Finally, he rolled right under it and jumped up quickly.

The droid merely turned its head all the way around and its body changed direction. Fortunately, Ashi got one good swipe and took the droids head off in a single slash.

Ashi thought he had won, but the head was still operating and the body kept attacking. Ashi fought and fought, but now he didn't quite know what to chop off next to end this assault. He slammed his foot into the droid's body with a well-placed jump kick. Both he and the droid flew back from each other. He landed on the ground and looked over at the head, only then realizing that it could still control the body. Before the body could get back up, he threw his hand out and the head flew across the room and into the disintegration field, vaporizing it. The body fell to the floor in a crumpled heap and stopped attacking.

Ashi cautiously stood up, his swords held out toward the body. Once he was certain that this droid was down for good, he put one sword away and went for the door. To his dismay, it was locked and he didn't have a code of any kind. He should have checked that Globulian for a key card of some kind. Then again, the leader probably has one key for this door since these children are valuable.

"I don't have time for this." He picked up one of the fallen guns from the droid and shot the door lock. It shorted out and the door unsealed. He shoved it aside and had to physically keep it open.

Inside were about two dozen children, huddled together and blubbing. They each looked up in fear and then joy at the sight of a friendly face.

Ashi fought to keep the door from shutting on him, "Come on, get out of here. This door's heavy."

The children, of many ages, got up and hurried through the narrow opening. They gathered in the hall and all stared at him.

Ashi watched the last little boy leave and he let the door close. He rubbed his neck at the strain and looked at the endearing but terrified eyes. "It's gonna be alright."

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from Page 8)

They had to leave, but not through the main ramp. "Come with me," he remembered seeing a door in the back, some kind of airlock used for docking ship to ship.

They went to the back of the ship and found the airlock. Ashi took a moment to consider how this would work. The shadow cast by the extended ramp let him know that there was some cover for the escape. The ramp would hide the children exiting the ship, but only if they stayed directly behind the ship. Considering all avenues he realized the grasses in the fields were longer right now, not having been bailed as yet this season. That should give these kids sufficient cover.

"Okay, I'm going to lower you to the ground, one at a time. Get low and walk straight into the grasses. Then get to the hills on the East. Do you understand me?" He looked at a mixture of nods and shakes. The older kids got it, the younger kids were too scared to understand. He took a girl by the shoulder, she seemed to be the oldest. "What's your name?"

"Shara."

He smiled, "Okay, everyone, Shara is going to be in charge. Follow her and do what she says. I promise you will see your moms and dads again." He knelt down and looked at Shara. "Did you understand what I told you?"

"Yes. You want us to get into the tall grass and hide there as we run."

He nodded, "Very smart girl."

"I'm scared. I wanna see my daddy." A little boy was on the verge of a good bawling.

Shara took his hand. "Do you play pouncers?"

He nodded.

"Good. That's what we're gonna do. Get low and take my tail, then someone take his tail, we'll all take a tail, and then when I go, you follow. Understand?" she asked.

The kids nodded, more in unison now.

Ashi was surprised. "Wow, you're good."

Shara grinned, "I have fifteen cousins that come over to play. We pounce all day. I always win."

"Good for you. Now, this is going to be fun, but don't make any noise." Ashi held up his hand and lifted her into the air, which made the other kids gasp. He gave them a shushing motion with his other hand, "No noise." they covered their mouths. "Now watch what she does."

They crowded the airlock and watched. Ashi lowered her out the airlock and down to the ground. She rushed straight into the grass and lowered herself. Her light brown fur blended almost perfectly in the tall, dry grasses. Only the tuft of her tail was seen, which was the way you played pouncers.

Ashi now lifted a younger boy and let him down. He followed her lead and ran into the grasses, taking her tail and then sticking his in the air. One by one, Ashi did this until the last child was safely on the ground and in cover of the grasses. Ashi watched the last little tail move away as they snaked through the grasses toward the hills to the east.

With a sigh of relief, he was glad that was over with. He almost jumped down himself, but a sneaky thought came to mind. He replaced the airlock hatch and went back to where he had crawled into the ship.

Ashi sank back into the bowels of this nasty ship and

crawled along the way toward the engineers port. He stopped halfway and found the power conduit that had burned part of his tail. It wasn't a normal system on a starship, it was a special addition for a unique device. They had wired the room that held the children with some sort of electrocution mechanism. He was no starship engineer, but he knew enough about these systems to set the power into a loop. He had an idea what the leader would do and that this would dampen his plans quickly.

After that, Ashi crawled the rest of the way out and left the ship much the same as when he had entered it. He was hidden directly behind the extended ramp. He replaced the port cover by use of the force and then peered around one side of the ramp. He would free as many people as he could, dealing individually with those mercenaries, then he would take down their leader. Without the children as a bargaining chip, the people were more apt to stand up to these few bullies.

He ran for a crate and hid behind it until the nearest guard wasn't looking. After that, he ran and joined yet another group of his people.

"IG 65 respond! IG 65!" Drak yelled at his communicator.

The Toydarian flew near his boss, "Your droids no answer?"

"I can't get IG 65 or 40 to answer. This isn't good."

The Toydarian stroked his chin, "If Jedi get in ship, he will free children. No hostages means no deal. I no like this."

"We still aren't sure it is a Jedi. It could be one of them trying to be a hero." Drak looked around to see if anything else looked different. No other group of these cats was missing, all his mercenaries were still at their posts.

"It is a Jedi." Out of nowhere came another voice.

Drak and the Toydarian both turned around to find Stef standing there with his hands up in surrender, the blaster dangling from his right hand. The Toydarian pointed his own gun at the Jahalan, but Drak pushed it down. "What did you say?"

"Look, I didn't come to fight you. I only want my daughter safely returned."

Drak went over and grabbed the weapon from the man and then pushed him, "On the ground, now."

Stef got down, much in the same position he had been when Ashi found him, even with his hands behind his head. "I don't know what you want with him, but it was a Jedi who saved us."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know." Stef was being honest, he wasn't certain where the Jedi had gone.

Drak got lower and pointed the end of the gun at Stef's face, "Can you point him out to me among your people?"

"Yes."

"Good. You just saved your daughter's life. Come." Drak nudged Stef in the side with his rifle and made him stand up. They would go group by group until he pointed out this Jedi.

Brain Benders

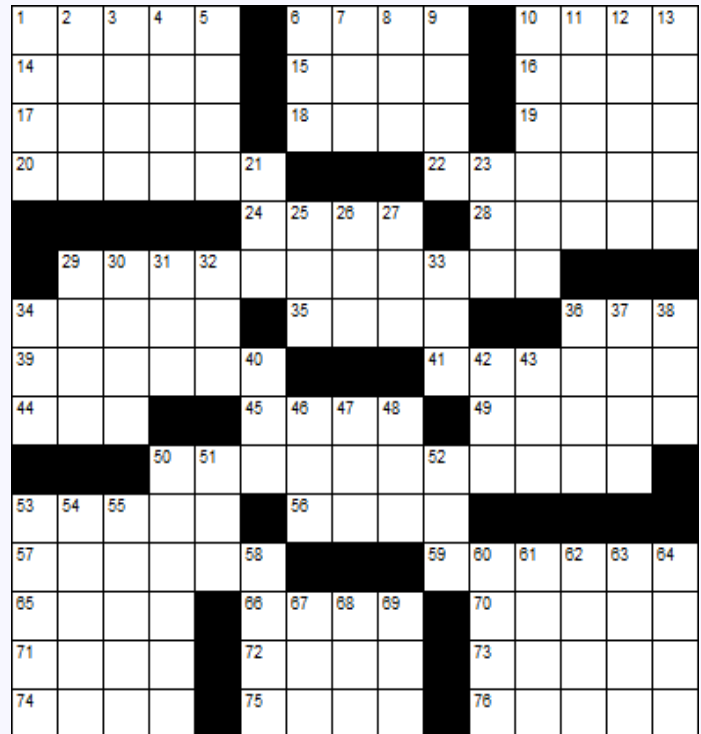
ACROSS

1. *Delta Force master sergeant sent to stop 76A, to his friends
6. *History professor chosen to undo the damage in time done by 76A, to her friends
10. Romanov ruler
14. Permeate
15. Shrek, for one
16. Home to Mount Konahuanui
17. Diver's apparatus
18. Tough
19. Not kosher
20. Diner
22. Cake in Cannes
24. *Pilot of the original time machine before 53D
28. Orchestra section
29. *Homeland Security agent assigned to oversee the time machine recovery mission
34. Roswell crash victim, supposedly
35. Voting "no"
36. Clavell's "___ Pan"
39. "You ___!" ("No!")
41. Disk-jockey bribe
44. Thus far
45. Standby sea-borne military org.
49. Respected elder
50. *Mysterious organization with an insidious agenda or its founder
53. Stationed
56. *fiancé of 6A in the edited present timeline
57. Go over old news
59. Wheel cover
65. Acid linked to gout
66. "The Sound of Music" backdrop
70. Debonair
71. Not say directly
72. Twerp
73. Inert gas
74. Popular jeans
75. *Control center programmer instrumental in helping track down the stolen time machine
76. *Master criminal who stole the Mothership in order to change American history
25. 1959 Kingston Trio hit
26. My, to Maurice
27. Likely
29. Whodunit hint
30. H.S. subject
31. No longer working: Abbr.
32. Wayside stop
33. With it
34. *Sister of 6A who was erased from history
36. Santa's sackful
37. On the safe side, at sea
38. *Fleming who helped prevent the abduction of Werner von Braun for delivery to the Soviets in 1944
40. Egyptian boy king
42. Without further ___
43. Singular or plural pronoun
46. RR stop
47. Opposite of paleo-
48. Genetic inits.
50. Takes counter-measures
51. Fingers
52. V.P. under L.B.J.
53. *Scientist who helped create the time machines
54. Eagle's nest
55. Excel
58. Pilgrimage to Mecca
60. "Wild blue yonder" org.
61. Singer Ives
62. See 68D
63. Stratford-upon-___ Station
64. ___ Station
67. Waikiki wear
68. Jimmy
69. Reggae relative

DOWN

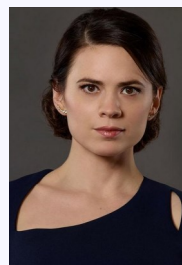
1. Judicious
2. '78 Village People hit
3. Adjoin
4. London Underground, with "the"
5. Binge
6. Fate
7. "Yecch!"
8. French vineyard
9. Safecracker
10. Sway as if to fall
11. Ranees's wrap
12. Yet to occur
13. *Recovery mission Lifeboat pilot, to his friends
21. "Of course!"
23. "___ you kidding?"

ESB Crockett's Spirited Crossword Puzzle *Temporal Tag Across Historical America by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa - April 2017

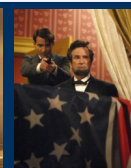


Answers to Previous Puzzle

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



See Clue 34D



More Brain Benders

SUDOKU PUZZLE

April 2017

Hard Non-Symmetrical

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to March's Sudoku Puzzle

Medium Non-Symmetrical

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

WORD SEARCH

April's Topic: Matt Frewer Roles

Look for 28 character names

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to March's Word Search:

Ted Shackelford Roles

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

Brain Benders

Word Search

April's Word List:

Al Fisher	Jobe Smith
Anthony Bruhl	Leo
Bob	Lloyd Christmas
Carnage	Lucy
Charlie	Mac Duff
CIA Agent	Max Headroom
Dr. Green	Mitch
Dr. Leekie	Moloch
Ed Kelvin	Nathan
Edison Carter	Paul Rice
Frank	Peter Blaine
Gene Kranz	Senior
Greg	Vidar
Jackal	Wally



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