



Crockett's Spirit

Impavidus Scribere Veritas — The Brave Write the Truth



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Fiction

Vanthea: Tyranny's Dawn

Book 2 - Elzivreth - Part 1

by LTJG Star Eagle

The present...

AS IT WAS customary for each matron in every temple of the Living World, since the religion's birth in an age long past and forgotten, Matron Elzivreth welcomed one of her order into the sanctum for a special birthday gift.

The matron wore a simple white robe with knot-work embroidery this day, and she stood behind the pedestaled divining basin that was made entirely of malachite. She called gently to the girl, some fifty feet away near the sanctum's entrance.

"Come to me, child," Elzivreth said sweetly, smiling.

The girl hesitated, pulling at the skirt of her light green dolly dress, dotted with little flowers. She looked up at the woman beside her who, like the matron, also wore a plain white robe. Istrelle gave her a little nudge and said, "Go ahead, Delendra. It's alright. Just remember your manners." She stroked the girl's long brunette hair once.

Delendra slowly began to walk through the ancient sanctum. It was a large circular room some fifty feet across with ten-foot walls and a dome that reached up twenty-five more feet. The creator of this

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Fiction

The Alfore Encounter - 44

"Unexpected"

by CAPT Two Wolves

"What would you like to know?" Malili asked.

"I'd like to know about my Starfleet career, will it be like my father's?" Janice asked, as she put down her empty mug.

"Although you are your father's daughter, your career will never be like his. In fact, your career took a distinct turn for the better when this young man walked into your life," Malili replied. Janice turned to look at Skonn. The Vulcan was in the midst of taking his last sip of tea, and had frozen in place like a professional mime.

Is, he breathing? Janice wondered. Skonn blinked, put the cup down and continued to stare off into space. Suddenly, without a word, he stood and walked out of the tent.

My, that was rude, Janice thought as she watched the tent flap fall silently back into place.

"Please forgive him..." Janice started.

"There is no explanation needed. He is a logical man who doesn't understand that which he perceives to be illogical. He does not understand true passion and love," Malili explained to her.

"But, Vulcans have no emotions, or so they say," Janice responded.

"Every living being has emotions. Vulcan's are just more skillful at burying theirs with logic. Some are much more skilled at it than others. He, not so much," Malili said with a smile. "Apparently, my words found a crack in that logical armor of his."

Janice glanced from Malili's smiling face to the door flap.

"Go to him. I will be here if you need me," Malili encouraged. Janice stood, thanked the prophetess and left.

Outside, Janice tossed her shawl about her shoulders and looked around for Skonn.

"Skonn, where are you?" she whispered, knowing he wouldn't have gone far.

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grove had built the sanctum far below the trees up above and the mound on which the grove stood. She looked around to the ancient columns that lined the walls of this room. Though they were crudely carved, they bore intricately carved runes that glowed the faintest amount of blue light, letters in ancient Dracani that told stories and legends that few people knew, let alone understood or remembered.

Delendra continued, now looking up to the dome above. While torches lined the walls, they never burned out, providing adequate lighting for the sanctum. The dome, however, held a special beauty; glowing quartz crystals dotted the entire ceiling. To a casual observer, they would appear to merely be a scattering of lights. To those who studied the stars, however, the crystals perfectly represented the constellations of the northern sky. In the center of the sanctum burned its most sacred relic, a flame of pure magick ten feet high, shooting out wisps of all colors but giving off no heat or smoke. The Fire Sorcerer created it thousands of years ago, to burn through all ages as long as magick remained in the world.

The girl kept walking slowly and cautiously. While she didn't know what the word "sacred" truly meant, she did know that this was a very special place, and that such things as running, playing and speaking out of turn were simply not allowed.

"It's alright, Delendra," reassured Elzivreth. "You are behaving very well. I have a special surprise for you today."

Delendra finally reached the basin, with Istrelle not far behind. She picked the girl up and put her on a flat stone so that she could see inside the basin and participate in the ritual. They all stood at equidistant positions from one another.

Delendra looked puzzled; finally she could take it no more. "Why isn't everybody else here?"

"Because this is something just for the three of us," explained the matron, "the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone." Then she got a gleam in her eye and winked. "No boys for this, just us girls!"

"But you're not a girl," responded Delendra, "you're a grandma!"

Istrelle snorted, stifling a laugh. Elzivreth's cat-like eldrin ears flattened a bit, but she grew a big smile. To know that this little girl thought of her as her own grandmother, regardless of blood or birth, filled her heart with quiet joy.

"Well, we all have girl parts," answered Istrelle, also smiling. "And don't worry, Delendra; we'll see everybody else before too long, when we have your birthday party."

"Yay, yay, yay!" squealed the girl, momentarily forgetting where she was. She then sobered up, looking at Elzivreth and expecting a scolding.

"So..." began the matron, focusing everyone on the basin, "do you know what this does?"

"It shows pictures of things that happened a long, long time ago," replied the girl, "and sometimes pictures of things that happen a long time from now."

"Yes!" answered Elzivreth. "But whatever it reveals to us, it is always that which we need to know. And today, child, we are going to make the basin work just for you!"

The matron bent down, picking up a pitcher. She poured water into the basin, saying "Water is like the blood of our world. It is fluid and ever-changing, just like time itself." She put down the water pitcher and then picked up a smaller pitcher. Pouring a bit of milk into the basin, she said "Milk is sacred to Vanthea. It connects us to our world, nourishes us and gives us life. With milk we call forth the powers of the divine feminine." After setting down the milk pitcher, she stood back up and looked at Delendra. "Finally, I need something from you, child. I need one drop of your blood," she said, producing a small needle.

Delendra looked afraid. Istrelle put her hand on the child's back. "If you want to, I will poke you so it doesn't hurt so much."

"What are you saying?" asked Elzivreth.

"I'm saying that sometimes you don't know your own strength, Matron," replied Istrelle, trading smirks with Delendra.

Elzivreth shrugged, giving Istrelle the needle. She took it and looked at the girl. "So, which finger is it going to be?"

Delendra offered her right index finger. Istrelle made a fast poke as the child turned her head away. Then it was done. Istrelle took the girl's hand and placed it over the basin, gently massaging the finger until a drop of blood came out. A single drop spilled into the basin, making the contents swirl and glow faintly.

"Take hands," ordered the matron, just after Istrelle put the needle away. They did as she requested.

Elzivreth spoke. "Vanthea, we ask that you gift Delendra with a special vision on this, her fifth birthday. May it be something she enjoys and remembers always. May it be what she needs to know." Then she looked at Delendra. "Gaze into the basin. Soon you will begin to see a vision. We may or may not see it also, depending on what it is."

Moments passed as the translucent fluid played with light and shadow. Delendra's eyes widened as the vision coalesced.

"What do you see?" asked the others, for they could see nothing.

"It's a woman with a baby!" exclaimed the child. The woman was gaunt and appeared very weak. A young eldrin man was at her side, along with a younger version of Istrelle. "She's giving the baby to the man who's by her. He's very pretty. He has long blond hair and ears like Grandma's," explained the child.

"The word you are looking for is 'handsome,'" Elzivreth corrected. "Handsome means 'pretty' for men."

"Yes, he's very handsome," she answered, not quite getting it right. "And you're there too, Mommy!"

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Istrelle's heart saddened; she knew exactly which moment this was.

Delendra's eyes narrowed. "The lady's telling you to take the baby and follow her wishes. She wants you to take the baby to the grove—to this place." She paused, thinking it through. "I think that the baby is me. And that lady is my mother."

"Yes," interrupted Elzivreth, "she is the lady Maralyth. The man beside her is your father, Prince Dacien."

"I know," was all the girl had to say for a moment. Then she continued. "Father is giving me to you, Mommy. He's kneeling by Mother now. She's so sick...and sad..."

Istrelle looked at Elzivreth. "Does she really need to see this now? She should have something good and beautiful--"

"Shh. If this is what she needs, then so be it. We cannot spare her from this forever."

"Mother died!" spoke the girl, her voice trembling as tears began. "Father and you are crying too! Now you're leaving." Delendra had a realization. "She gave me to you so that we'd both be safe," she said, in a calmer voice of a woman beyond this girl's years.

"Yes, Delendra. They both sacrificed themselves so that you and I could live here in peace," answered Istrelle, with reflection.

"Is there anything else?" asked Elzivreth.

"Yes, it's changing," responded the child. Now she saw Dacien in a swordfight for his life. "Father is fighting a man." She grimaced. "He is really ugly. He looks rotted," she finished.

"You mean 'rotten,'" said Istrelle. "But yes, he was very ugly. And he was a very bad man."

Delendra saw the battle play out before her, how her father's sword finished the Undying One with its powers of the ancient eldrin kings. She watched as Dacien found Gul-Gothra's phylactery, encased in a deadly trap. "Father has to destroy the crystal. He's the only man who can do it. But everyone knows he's gonna die. He makes everyone leave," she said, entranced. "Then he destroys it. It explodes. Father's holding onto a necklace with a big crystal on it." She quickly looked up, all around her. "Now the really big tower is coming apart. Father's bleeding and dying. Now he's dead, too!" she cried. As she came out of it, she noticed the two women. Istrelle had a curious look about her, while Elzivreth's expression was more one of concern.

"Is it possible?" asked Istrelle simply.

"I do not see how...no," answered the matron. She gazed squarely at the child. "Is there anything else, Delendra?"

Frustration covered the girl's face. She looked back at Elzivreth, then at Istrelle.

"Well, yes or no?" asked Istrelle.

Some voice from deep within the girl's soul stirred within her, a voice of almost infinite power and wisdom. All Delendra knew was that the feeling was true, and that she must obey it.

"We have to do this," she declared, and then she plunged her hands—and theirs—into the basin. The two women gasped. They wanted to break free, but the

power of the magick compelled them all to remain still. The basin itself glowed brighter, and the liquid within began to emit tendrils of steam. Soon, even the runes on the columns and the star-crystals in the dome were glowing brightly.

All three of them had eyes that now matched the color of the fluid in the basin, looking up to some unknown power in the center of all of this. It was, of course, the power of the vision magick, now revealing itself to the reluctant trinity.

The story of a man in a desert city far away unfolded, the tale of the thief Ranib, his near-death and rebirth as the Foreseer, and the creation of a new religion. They saw everything, including the spirits of the fourteen beings who made a pact with this hapless man. Most importantly, they saw his power, their power made manifest through him, and the ominous, inevitable result of this event: war, conquest, and death.

The vision abruptly ceased, causing everything to return to its normal state. The women caught their breaths as a sense of foreboding overcame them. They all removed their hands from the basin.

"Delendra, are you alright?" asked Istrelle, leaning down and taking the girl in her arms.

"Yes, Mommy; I'm fine," she responded, though she sounded distant.

Istrelle stood up and looked to her mentor. "Matron, what does this mean?"

"What this means," stated Elzivreth, her eyes narrowing to slits, "is that we have work to do."

Delendra began to cry uncontrollably, as any person would after realizing that she had no control over what she had just done. "I ruined my birthday! Now we can't have a party because we have to work! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to do it! I'm sorry!" she finished, and then she started another round of tears.

Elzivreth went to her, getting on her knees in front of the child. She placed each hand on Delendra's shoulders firmly but gently. "Delendra, look at me," she spoke softly. Delendra quit crying and did as she was told.

"My dear, dear child, you have not spoiled anything," Elzivreth continued. "You have given us a great gift. We don't know what it means yet, but we will find out. But, my dear girl, we are not going to do anything until after you have had your birthday party, complete with friends and sugared plums and honey cakes...alright?"

"Alright," answered Delendra. The tears stopped flowing.

"Now, go with Istrelle back up to the abbey, and I will join you in just a minute," Elzivreth said, smiling and getting back up.

"Come on, dear heart," said Istrelle, reaching out her hand. The child took it, and soon they were walking out of the sanctum.

Elzivreth walked to the middle of the chamber. She looked up, deep in thought. She knew that they had just experienced the beginning of something profound and terrible. She didn't know what it was, or even yet what to do about it, but she decided right here and now that she would find the answers, nonetheless.

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"I am here," Skonn replied, emerging from the shadows like a wisp of smoke.

"Are you alright?" she asked. "You left like you we're going to be ill."

"I am functioning within established perimeters," Skonn replied.

Janice rolled her eyes. "Why didn't you just say, 'I am fine?'"

"I believe I just did, Captain."

"Eh, what did I tell you about that? We are officially on leave. No captain or first officer titles until we return to duty. That's an order," Janice said, her voice firm.

"Affirmative. I suggest we return to our hotel."

"Hey, not so fast. The night is still young. I'd like to do some more exploring, if you don't mind," Janice said. The foot traffic around them had increased. Crowds of people perused The Night Market looking for good deals, food, or entertainment.

They turned and walked back towards the hotel. On the way they passed what appeared to be an open air bar and eatery. The main building housed a gigantic tavern and restaurant, but with all its sliding panel doors pulled back, with extra chairs and tables forming a mini amphitheater stage area. The main attraction was a Karaoke sing along, where a human Asian male was bringing the house down with an Elvis Presley impression the even Elvis himself couldn't have topped.

"Surely, you do not intend to..." Skonn started, inwardly horrified.

"Why not?" Janice asked. "I won prizes for singing Karaoke back in the day." Skonn inwardly sighed. He had no choice but to follow her inside the crowded establishment. She boldly commandeered two chairs. He sat down beside her.

* * * * *

Three hours later, Skonn was aroused out of his sleep by the sound of someone either crying or laughing, he couldn't tell which. He listened for a minute and then determined that the bipolar-like person was none other than his commanding officer.

Skonn eased his left eye open and was greeted by complete darkness, but he could discern Janice's outline as she sat at the bedroom table. When he sat up and attempted to swing his legs over the side of the bed, the room tilted crazily, and he fell flat on his face to the carpeted floor.

"Skonn, are you okay?" Janice asked. Skonn lay there and frowned at both the bed and the floor as if the objects had betrayed him.

"I am functioning within..." Skonn started. "I am fine," he said, as he got up and sat on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands.

"You don't look fine. Headache?" she asked.

"Is that what humans call this condition?" Skonn asked.

"Er, actually, you have a hangover," Janice replied.

"Hangover? I do not imbibe," Skonn stated as he looked up at Janice. Her face was clearer now in the

mere hints of the greying dawn which was starting to show itself through the curtained window. Apparently, she had been crying, as she still had tear streaks on her face.

"Apparently, we both imbibed," She said, indicating the two empty wine bottles and glasses on the table. "The headache is a sign of dehydration. Here, have some water," she offered as she poured some in a glass and handed it to him. Skonn took it from her, sipped it, and gazed at her. There was something she wasn't telling him.

"What untoward thing did we do while we were intoxicated?" He asked.

"No. I think we got intoxicated after we did the untoward thing," she said.

"And what would that be?" Skonn asked, privately dreading the answer. In reply, Janice handed him an old fashioned, fancy, document envelope. Skonn put his glass down on the night table, opened the envelope and withdrew the document. It took less than five seconds for the Vulcan to determine something was very, very, wrong.

"Is this official?" Skonn asked. "Why do I not possess any recollection of this happening?" Skonn asked.

"Yes, it is official, and we don't remember because we were both drunk as sodden skunks," Janice replied.

"But, this document states that we are joined in holy matrimony," Skonn protested, feeling the need to have his own private, hysterical breakdown. A tiny twitter broke their shocked silence.

Janice looked up at Echo who was perched on the edge of her hanging nest and laughing.

"What are you laughing at?" Janice demanded of the tiny dragon in her command voice. Echo put her hand paws over her snout and ceased laughing. But, then, as a last act of defiance, she stuck her tongue out at Janice and fled into her nest.

"Skonn! She stuck her tongues out at me!"

"She only has one tongue, Janice. It's bifurcated or forked," Skonn told her.

"But, where'd she learned to do that, if she's only around you?" Janice asked. Skonn chose to ignore her question and handed the certificate and envelope back to Janice.

"It says here in the fine print that there is a seventy two hour cooling off period, in case both parties change their minds and want an annulment," she read.

"Am I that detestable?" Skonn whispered.

"Oh my God! I never said that! I would never say or even think such a thing!" Janice said. In one quick move she was across the room, sitting on the bed beside him, and cupping his face with both hands. Skonn tried to steel himself against the onslaught of emotions that would batter him, but, none came.

Fascinating. It is almost as if she were Vulcan or underwent a Vulcan mind cleansing ritual, Skonn thought to himself.

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"I'm sorry. I totally forgot about the Vulcan aversion to touch," Janice said as she hastily removed her hands and placed them in her lap.

They both gazed into each other's eyes without speaking for a minute. Then Skonn did a strange thing, he gently grasped both of her hands in his and kissed them.

"That means I'm a keeper?" Janice asked.

"Affirmative," Skonn replied, as he leaned in and gave her a chaste kiss on her lips.

"Well, that certainly was enlightening," Captain Wekk huffed as she and K'Tal left the brig.

"How so? The witch did not say a word," the Klingon responded as they both strode to the lift.

"She didn't have to speak. The fact that her deputies were confined to a cell separate from hers told me a lot. Even her own crew wants nothing to do with her. And her second in command informed us that she's supposedly on a hunger strike. Five days and twenty hours away from Vulcan, that's not a hunger strike, that's a fast," Wekk remarked.

"It's most fortuitous that you informed your Chief Medical Officer of her condition. You wouldn't want the harridan to die on your watch," K'Tal said in response.

"Yes, two of Doctor Winn's nurses are Vulcan healers and will certainly keep their eyes on her. I think she's doing this stuff just to create drama."

"She could create drama that would cause a diplomatic nightmare. She may be crazy, Ajasa, but she's not stupid," K'Tal warned. "I suggest you keep a double watch on both her and her crew."

"So noted, K'Tal," Wekk replied, then stood to the side while she gave additional orders to Lieutenant Frakes.

"Now, let's go have that War Nog," K'Tal suggested once Wekk had finished.

"Absolutely," Wekk agreed.

"Lieutenant Frakes to Captain Wekk."

Wekk's eyes opened and she glanced at the chronometer. It said 0400 hours.

Wow, I slept for an entire hour, She thought. "Wekk here," she said.

"Captain, there's been an incident in the brig," Frakes informed the captain. "Both the brig and Sickbay are on lock down."

"Where are you, Lieutenant?" Wekk asked.

"In the brig," Frakes answered.

"I'll meet you in five," Wekk responded, as she rolled out of bed and reached for her uniform.

Fiction

Star Wars - Ashi's Shame

Chapter 9: Freedom and Fear

by LT Ashinaga

Ashi sat with his head low as he listened for the guard to pass. As soon as the guard was a good distance away, he looked around the group he had joined. Then he carefully examined all the other groups of Jahalans.

"Where are the city guards?" He asked in a low whisper.

A woman next to him looked at him, "Who are you?"

"A friend. I'm here to help you. Where are your guards?"

She pointed toward the area of small warehouses. "They're outside over there. They put all their weapons in the warehouse and locked it tight."

Ashi smiled but quickly lowered his head as the guard passed by again. Once the guard was gone, he whispered, "I'm going to free them. When the fighting starts, I want everyone to get to safety."

A man listening in said, "No. We can't. They have the children."

"Not anymore. I just freed them. The kids are safely away from the ship right now."

Everyone gasped and looked around in eagerness to see their own child or grandchild.

"Hey! What's going on?" The guard stopped and pointed his gun at them.

A quick thinking older woman said, "I just said I needed to use the restroom. They are worried about me asking."

The guard sneered, "Just wet the ground, old woman. No one moves until we have the Jedi."

He lowered his gun and continued pacing back and forth.

Ashi gave a thankful look at the old woman. Then he said, "Remain calm and act like nothing new is happening. I have to unseal that warehouse."

"Don't be foolish. Getting all the way over there would be impossible. You'll be caught." The woman said.

Ashi smiled, "Not for a Jedi." This time, everyone held back their gasps, though they all did glance in his direction. He whispered, "Don't look at me. Just stare down and act defeated."

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Everyone turned their faces down and waited. They expected him to leave, but he didn't. Ashi merely closed his eyes and focused his mind on the force in this area. He knew he wasn't as strong in the force as most Jedi, but he had to be strong to win this day. He could see the lock in his mind; almost touch it through the force. It was an old computer lock that sealed the door; they didn't block it with anything physical. He focused hard and nothing happened. He tried to press the buttons, but he couldn't do that kind of delicate work from here. Finally, he went for the brutish method, he crushed the whole lock with the force. The door was unsealed. Now all he had to do was grip the door with his mind and slide it open. This was going to take some work.

"Okay! This is the fourth group. Is he here?!" Ashi's concentration was broken by the voice of the raiders' leader.

He looked up to find the Rodian and a Toydarian both pushing another Jahalan toward this group. Ashi immediately recognized the man with them.

Stef looked around the group, "I...I don't see him."

Drak leaned in closer and growled out, "Look harder. If you're buying him time by wasting mine, your daughter's life will be the least of your worries."

Ashi suddenly realized that Stef was looking for him. He lowered his head all the more and did not make eye contact.

Stef pointed at Ashi, "There he is. That's him."

Ashi couldn't help but look up now. If this man pointed to any of the others, they would be killed on the spot. What he found was a finger pointing right at him. He was cold inside; one of his own had just betrayed him. He was right on track for rescuing them, and he was betrayed. He slowly stood up and pulled out his swords. "How could you?"

Drak smiled while the Toydarian pointed his rifle at their target. Drak said, "He's just making the right choices."

Ashi burst into motion and leapt over his own people to get between them and the enemy. The Toydarian shot at him but missed each time. The people on the ground screamed and ran now that they were in the line of fire.

Ashi thrust a hand out and shoved Drak into Stef and sent both men tumbling halfway across the port. He deflected two blaster shots with his swords and then cut the end of the blaster right off. The Toydarian foolishly pulled the trigger and

the damaged barrel backfired and it exploded in his face, killing him.

Running across the open port, Ashi made his way toward the restrained guards. The other mercenaries were in a state of confusion and were running for their leader, not for him. He reached the group and met the mercenary overseeing them. It was the twi-lek he had mind tricked earlier. The tailhead shot at him twice, but Ashi was quicker to dodge the attacks. Unfortunately, the Twi-Lek had enough distance to make it hard for Ashi to get to him. Fortunately, he was surrounded by trained guards who were no longer under the watchful eye of this mercenary.

Ashi tumbled away from several more blasts and deflected one aimed at his head. He almost jumped into a dash at the attacker when five guards pummeled the man to the ground. Though their hands were still bound, they used their entire bodies to slam this Twi-Lek. With a hard knee to the head, the mercenary was knocked out cold.

Ashi used his swords to break the binding on their hands, "I'll unseal it; get your weapons."

They didn't ask questions, they simply went to the doors and shoved them aside to get their standard weapons. They carried special rifles used for hunting on the open plains. They were soldiers weapons, but it gave Ashi an idea.

Ashi stopped them before they followed him out into the port. "Wait for the right moment, and then start picking off those mercenaries. We can't have open fighting, too many innocent people around."

"What are you going to do?" A guard asked.

Ashi eyed his target, "I'm going to take down their leader."

* * * * *

Ashi walked back around the warehouses and found Drak standing in the middle of the port. Drak had his arm up, prepared to press a button on his wrist computer. "I suggest you surrender, Jedi. I have hostages on the ship, children of these cats."

Taking a step closer, Ashi had a plan. "Let them go and leave. Or I'll cut you down."

"Don't even think about it, Jedi. I have all the cards here. Move, and they suffer."

Ashi pretended to use the force, lifting his hand.

"Fine." Drak pressed the button and waited. There should be a terrific sound of children screaming in pain. He would stop the shocking and give his ultimatum to the Jedi.

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No screaming came. There was a growing shrill sound coming from the belly of the ship. Drak pressed the button again and again, but he couldn't get the results he wanted. Suddenly Ashi's rewiring overcharged the power cell and it exploded, blowing out a landing strut as well as most of the starboard section. The ship crashed against the ground, the ramp on it crushed.

The explosion and subsequent crash caused enough confusion that the guards began to pick off mercenaries at a distance. They used their hunting rifles like snipers and cut down five mercenaries before anyone realized what was happening. The Jahalan citizens became animated and fled the fires and laser blasts.

Drak looked up at the Jedi who had both his swords ready for a fight. "What have you done to my ship?!"

"Oh, didn't I tell you. I freed the kids and then left you a little gift. You really shouldn't install power systems without the proper insulation components. It can backfire." Ashi was having fun toying with this man.

Drak looked behind Ashi to see the chaos in the streets. His mercenaries were almost all dead, the people running away free, and his ship in ruins. "You think you've won, Jedi, but you haven't."

Ashi said, "I'm no Jedi. But, yes, I've already won. Surrender and I won't kill you for what you've done."

Drak pulled out the lightsaber and turned it on, its green blade extending out from his hand. "This isn't over yet, Jedi. The bounty on your head is worth a thousand starships, and it looks like only one of us has a lightsaber." Drak held it up with impressive skill.

This startled Ashi, his swords could not contend against a real lightsaber. They can deflect energy weapons, but a true lightsaber will cut them apart in the first strike. He had to disarm this man and get the weapon from him.

As if a terrible cold wind had arrived, the force turned wicked. Ashi trembled and his eyes bugged when he saw a figure standing on the hull of the broken ship. A hooded sith lord exuding malevolence.

"Who...Who are you?" Ashi asked in a dry voice.

Drak was confused, he assumed the question was directed at him. "I'm Drak, the one who is going to bring you to the empire for a tidy sum."

Ashi didn't hear him, his eyes were glued on the figure standing behind this man. "Master

Roh...I'm not ready. I can't face him now."

"Who are you talking to, Jedi?" He took a bold step forward, pointing his lightsaber at Ashi.

Ashi stepped back, "I...no, not it can't be." The sounds of the conflict behind him turned into memory. He could hear the Jedi being killed, he could hear the children screaming, he could see the bodies laying all around him. Blood stained the streets.

Drak had enough of this stalling, "Fine, if you're not going to surrender, I'll just take your head now." He launched into an attack.

"No!" Ashi bellowed and shoved with all the force he could muster. Drak went flying backward across the ground and rolled nearly into the burning metal of his ship.

Without even looking back, Ashi ran for his life. He fled out of the village into the trees. He ran hard for what felt like hours, the fear welling up in his belly.

Finally reaching the breaking point he stopped and fell to his knees. For one brief moment, he looked back, terrified at the thought of that dark figure standing behind him. He couldn't face a real Sith lord, he wasn't even a real Jedi. But the trees were vacant of any other person. The village was far below him now, the sight of the burning ship just a glow behind the buildings.

He fell back on his rear and leaned against a tree. All he could do was what he did that day, the day he fled the Temple, he wept like a child.

Drak slowly got himself up and held his bruised head. The heat of the fire was very close and he had to get away before the ship collapsed on him.

He looked up hoping to find that Jedi again, but what he found was dismal. The only remaining mercenary was having a firefight with ten Jahalans, the citizens were all fleeing out of the way, and the children were coming down from the hills. His grand plan was in utter ruins.

"I've gotta get out of here." He muttered. It wouldn't be long before the security came after him and he didn't want to be thrown in some jail on this world.

Retrieving the fallen lightsaber Drak ran out of the port toward the trees. His ship was destroyed and he couldn't stick around for the weekly transport to pick him up. Besides, he still had to bring that Jedi's dead body to the Empire. He has thrown every last credit to his name into this venture, he needed something in return. But, how and where?

Fiction

Fallen Angel - Part 40

by Capt Wynan

It had been two weeks since Lillian had fallen ill with the sleeping sickness. Although she was still weak, she was getting better with each passing day. Angel sat with a blanket across her lap in a rocking chair made by Boomer soaking up the warmth of the morning sun in front of their quarters. Lillian sat beside her in a chair made for her also by Boomer. She was reading the book of notes that she and Professor Pearson had been adding information into about the planet's plant and animal life. During the day, they could sit outside unencumbered and enjoy the fresh air and sun but at night the healers still needed to use the healing plants to help them in their recovery.

Captain Moore strode across the compound heading towards Angel and Lillian. Henderson was following behind him. Neither man looked to be in a good mood.

"Lillian, why don't you go inside and get the other book for me, I will be in after a bit," Angel said to the child.

Lillian looked at the glowering faces of the two men and, clutching the book to her chest, went inside. Angel stood as the two finally reached her and stopped.

"Do you know, have you heard..." Henderson began.

Captain Moore held up his hand, silencing his mechanic.

"Angel, we need you to speak to the natives. Some have gotten it into their fool heads, once again, that they will be going with the ship," Moore said through clenched teeth.

"Can you believe that? They will die up there!" Henderson said, exasperated. "I have tried telling them the ship won't carry their weight, but they refuse to listen!"

Once again Moore held up his hand to silence his mechanic who looked as if he might blow a gasket, or at the very least, punch something.

"I know you and Lillian are still recuperating but we really need you to come with us before these fools blow the whole mission and fix it so no one gets off this planet," Moore said.

"I will come with you. Let me tell Lillian and then I will meet you at the entrance," She said as she folded the blanket and set it on the chair. She walked over to the door that stood open and looked in to find Lillian and the professor going over another book.

"Lillian, Professor, I will be back shortly. The men need me at the launch site," Angel said to them.

"We will be just fine here, Lillian and I have discovered we have mixed up the leaves of the succulent aria and the succulent venous," he said with a chuckle.

Angel left them and hurried after the two men. Her body still hurt from the use of her body by the plants to filter out the toxins from the sleeping illness. "Just another thing to get used to with a physical body," she muttered to herself. She thought of Lillian as she walked across the compound towards the launch site and smiled. The pain was worth it to see her getting better day by day.

Angel approached the launch site just outside the walls of the compound. The rocket rose sixty feet into the air and

looked as if it were ready to fall apart at the slightest breeze. Shaking her head, she just couldn't understand how they could think this would work in the first place.

Henderson was yelling at two of the natives who were dressed in what Angel could only assume was their idea of a space suit. Generally, they normally wore robes for ease of movement and comfort but these two had on robes that had been converted into a one-piece suit, poorly stitched, with no gloves on their hands or shoes on their feet. A large bowl with a cut out glass insert in the front with the suit material glued to the bottom edge of it was their helmet, no oxygen tanks, or tubes, or any other protection at all.

Angel touched Henderson on the arm and waited for him to calm down a moment before she informed the natives how poor their choice of a space suit was and the dangers of outer space with no oxygen tank or a way to replace the oxygen when the ship-board supply ran out. She explained that the material needed to make a properly sealed space suit was not something that could be obtained on this planet, and the technology for continuous oxygen for the suit was likewise unavailable. She then told them that if the rocket did get the message to their friends and they came here, they would be more than happy to welcome them aboard a truly safe space ship and be sure they were fitted with suits that would accommodate them in space.

Henderson stood there watching as Angel explained it all to them in their language. He watched as their faces gradually fell. "Huh! Finally getting the idea of it are ya? None of you are going to be getting yourselves killed on my watch," He said. He started to turn away thinking the whole thing was settled when he saw one of the native's face light up with a big smile.

"Angel, what did you say to him to make him so happy?" Henderson asked.

"I just informed him we could help them go on a space-walk when a ship gets here to retrieve us," she replied.

"Cut 'em loose is what I would like to do to these daft young natives," he growled as he turned to go back over and put the last few finishing touches on the ship.

"Sir, are you sure this thing will even make it out of the atmosphere?" Angel, dubious, asked Captain Moore.

"Frankly, Angel, I don't know for sure. We have coated it with the hardest epoxy resin we could create with the materials at hand and used the best metal we could salvage from the ship. I almost feel like the old saying is true, 'the only thing holding her together is bubble gum and a prayer,'" Moore said with a chuckle.

"What is bubble gum?" Angel asked curiously.

"Next time we go to Jaxon's I will get you some and then you will know," He said, unable to stifle a grin.

"When do you think the ship will be ready for lift off?" Angel then asked.

"I'm hoping for the day after tomorrow. Henderson and the rest of the crew have been going over everything with the natives and if we can keep control of the few daredevils trying to sneak on board, we should be ready for launch at sunrise. Once she is aloft, we'll just have to wait. If Jaxon gets the message, he will come. If not, well, I guess we'll be living the rest of our lives here on this planet. Kroll said it has been several generations since any ships have been in this area, let alone having come down to the planet's surface," Moore said, weariness in his voice.

"Well, I guess we will just have to hope that the bubble gum and the prayer will be enough," Angel said looking up at the captain.

Moore nodded in agreement.

Brain Benders

ACROSS

1. Anvil user
6. Carpenter's groove
10. Mideast hot spot
14. Cliffside dwelling
15. First murder victim
16. Computer list
17. Autumn yard worker
18. Centers of activity
19. Leaf
20. Personals, e.g.
21. "The loneliest number"
23. Hail, to Caesar
25. Churchill's sign
26. By way of
27. Speaker's stand
29. *IT girl turned vigilante
34. Pi follower
35. Midterm, for one
36. Highway
38. Muscat is its capital
41. XXVII divided by IX
42. *Team ___: vigilante group founded by 9D
44. Silent assent
46. Arduous journey
49. Indolent
50. Decorative needle case
51. .001 inch
53. *Original name of the city that the criminal elite failed
55. Gaps in manuscripts

59. Brit. fliers
60. "...___ in a galaxy..."
61. Kind of instinct
62. Sock hop locale
63. Beyond tipsy
66. Indian bread
68. Hindu princess
70. Gravy ingredient
72. Give as an example
73. Carrier whose name means "skyward"
74. Flood embankment
75. Geraint's lady
76. What libraries do
77. Swelling



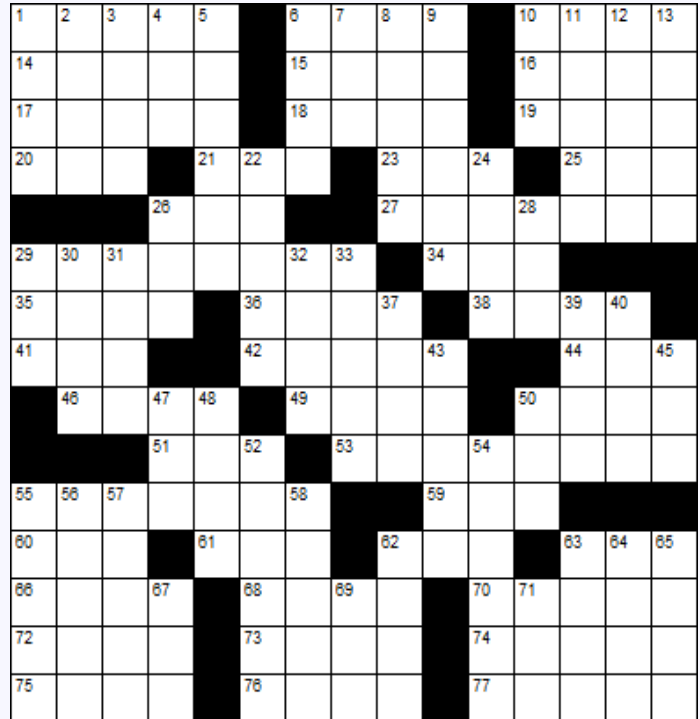
DOWN

1. *Younger sister of 52D and former member of a clandestine league
2. Honeyed drink
3. Nettles
4. Draw
5. Like Supergirl or the Flash
6. ___ Arden, Flash Gordon's companion
7. Blood-typing system
8. Stick-on
9. *Shipwreck survivor who founded a team
10. Mischievous one
11. Rob one of something by force
12. Inflame
13. *See 9D
22. Nigerian currency unit
24. Reverberate
26. Gusto
28. Actor Arnold
29. *Yao ___
30. Departure
31. Den
32. Donut-shaped surfaces
33. Gridiron units
37. Blockhead
39. Opposed to
40. Verb preceder
43. Jaded
45. *Vigilante team member originally hired as a bodyguard, familiarly
47. Flightless bird
48. Picture card
50. Little toymaker
52. *Attorney turned vigilante, with 55D
54. Talk aimlessly
55. *See 52D
56. From the top
57. Raccoon relative
58. Old hat
62. Embellish
63. Zero, in tennis
64. News bit
65. *Younger sister of 9D
67. Outlaw Kelly
69. Bert Bobbsey's twin
71. Bloodshot

ESB Crockett's Spirited Crossword Puzzle

*"Guy in a Green Hood with a Bow"

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa - May 2017



Answers to Previous Puzzle

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



More Brain Benders

SUDOKU PUZZLE

May 2017

Very Easy Symmetrical

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to April's Sudoku Puzzle

Hard Non-Symmetrical

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

WORD SEARCH

May's Topic: Alex Kingston Roles

Look for 23 character names

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to April's Word Search:

Matt Frewer Roles

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	O	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	E	F	H	C	I	L
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

Brain Benders

Word Search

May's Word List:

Anna	Lady Macbeth
Boudica	Lisa Locke
Brownie	Lucy Costin
Daniella	Miranda Pond
Dinah Lance	Mrs. Solomon
Dr. Howard	Noreen
DS Lisa Holm	Peternelle
Ellen	Quickshadow
Ellie Lagden	Ria
Fiona Banks	River Song
Helen Maynard	Sheila
Jackie	Verity Graham



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