



Crockett's Spirit

Impavidus Scribere Veritas — The Brave Write the Truth



Volume 5 Issue 7

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Fiction

Vanthea: Tyranny's Dawn

Book 2 - Elzivreth - Part 3

by LTJG Star Eagle

Still the present...

Jaen leaned over Delendra's bed, tucking her in for the night. He bent down to give her a small kiss on her forehead. She smiled. He then sat down in his chair which was just next to her bed. The single large candle on the nightstand cast a dim but warm glow over both their faces in the small chamber which was her bedroom, big enough for just him, her, the nightstand and a small wardrobe.

"So," Jaen began, his eyes twinkling, "which story is it going to be tonight?"

The girl thought for a moment. "Grampa, I have a question."

"And just what would that be, my dear?"

"How long has the Grove been here?" she asked, pondering over what had happened to her earlier that day. "Who made it?"

Jaen's eyebrows raised. "Hmm...well, that is a very old story about a very old thing, isn't it?"

She nodded.

"This story begins thousands of years ago, before the dorvs and the elderen, and even before the dragons ruled the skies."

"Before *you* were alive, Grampa?" she asked, smiling and giggling.

(Continued on Page 2)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1 Fic. by LTJG Star Eagle | Fic. by CAPT Two Wolves

2 thru 5 Fiction by LTJG Star Eagle cont'd

6 Fiction by CAPT Two Wolves cont'd

7 Fiction by Capt Wynan

8 thru 10 Fiction by LT Ashinaga

11, 12 Crossword, Sudoku & Word Search Puzzles

13 Word Search List / Humor | ESB & CS Staff

Fiction

The Alfore Encounter - 46

"A Rock and a Hard Place"

by CAPT Two Wolves

Despite Captain Wekk's lack of sleep she had an enjoyable time with Jessica and her grandmother Marisol. From the moment they sat down for brunch, until the end of the tour, Jessica asked questions. What impressed Ajasa was the fact that Jessica carried a tablet and took painstaking notes.

At the end of the tour, Wekk suggested that once Jessica reached the allowable age, she should consider enrolling in Starfleets newest endeavor, the Starfleet Explorers Program. This was where potential candidates for Starfleet Academy took a six month crash program which taught them all the rudiments Starfleet.

At the end of the tour, Marisol Gomez thanked the captain for being so kind and patient with her overly inquisitive granddaughter.

I've met with so called dignitaries that I've wanted to flush out of the nearest airlock, the captain thought as she smiled and shook both of their hands.

Jessica was a breath of fresh air, Captain Wekk mused as she headed back to her quarters. She was debating whether or not to take a crash nap when Lieutenant Commander Frakes hailed her.

"Yes, Frakes?" Wekk responded, all thoughts of sleep now gone.

"I have some bad news for you, Captain. Deputy T'Pell has exited this mortal coil." Frakes was an articulate speaker to the point of sounding like a Vulcan.

"You mean she's dead."

"I believe I just said that, Captain," Frakes confirmed.

Wekk wanted to break out in song. *Ding dong, the witch is dead, the witch is dead, the witch is dead. Ding dong, the wicked witch is dead!* But, for the sake of decorum, she did not.

(Continued on Page 6)

(Continued from Page 1, Column 1)

"Yes, you ornery little pill, before I was born, too!" he snapped back in mock indignation. "Way back then, the world lay in ashes. People had made it that way by making war on one another. No one knows how they did it, but they nearly destroyed the world. Oh—and I should tell you that they didn't have magick, either. They had great and wondrous machines, and towers that seemed to reach the clouds themselves. They knew much in the ways of science, I believe. Yet they knew not magick because they had forgotten their connection to our world. Tell me child, what happens when we forget about something, especially when it is very important?" he asked.

"When we forget, we can no longer believe," she responded, as if from recitation.

"And when we refuse to believe, then we forget," finished Jaen. He sat up in the chair. "The two are always companions to our faith, child. Never forget that." He then sat back.

"I know, Grampa. I know," replied the child.

"After the Forgotten War--"

"Wait, Grampa," interrupted Delendra, "how can you call it that when you know about it?"

"Well, I may know about it, and now you are learning about it," he smiled, pointing at her, "but very few men remain who know of these things. Also, we have forgotten much about that time—how people lived, what they did, and how exactly they did it. Their science nearly rivaled what we can do with magick, girl." He drew close to her. "They were connected to each other by their science, but they were no longer connected to their world. So their forgetfulness destroyed them. But they left clues behind as to their science and their power in the form of wondrous machines. And that's why the dorvs love machines so much!"

"They want to ruin the world again?" asked the girl.

Jaen sat back, sighing. "No, Delendra. Dorvs don't really trust magick. Never have. They only trust what they can make from stone and metal and crystal. They think their machines give them more power," he finished, sadly.

"More power than what?"

"Enough power to not live in fear," finished the old man, his voice now even sadder. The futility and foolishness of this belief weighed at his heart. Then, returning mentally to this place and time, he changed his expression and continued.

"After the war, Vanthea brought magick back to the world!" he said, his face beaming. "But the magic was very powerful and wild. People had to relearn how to use it, but the knowledge was beyond them. But then, four great sorcerers appeared, reminding the people of their connection with the world, and with one another. Each one had begun to control a single element--"

"Air, water, earth and fire!" interrupted the girl.

"Yes, right!" the old man smiled, becoming excited. "Then Vanthea sent the Elemental Guardians to become one with each sorcerer—and then they became the Elemental Highpriests."

"How did they do that?" pondered the girl aloud.

Each guardian asked to share the body of each sorcerer, and they agreed. Then, each of them had two souls inside."

"But how, Grampa?" demanded the child.

Jaen sat back, raising his hands into the air. "I don't know, dear. There are some things even Grampa and Gramma do not know." He brought his hands back down. "But sometimes it's not as important to know how or why something has happened, but only to know that it did happen, and to believe it."

Delendra looked at her grandfather for a few seconds, digesting the truth of what he had just said. "Alright, Grampa. But why did they do that?"

"Well," began Jaen, smiling again, "the guardians gave the highpriests enough power to truly become masters of their own element. When they worked alone, they were very powerful. But, when they worked together, they were truly wondrous." He sat back up. "They helped create the races of men that we know today. They taught them to build cities, and to learn agriculture, so they would always have food and shelter. But most importantly, they used magick to help people. Then, they taught others to do the same."

"So they did good things after the bad people ruined everything?"

"Very much so, yes. They weren't perfect, of course, but their hearts were in good places."

"Did they help make the dragons?"

Jaen sat back, grinning sardonically. "They could have. But even if they did, my dear, the dragons will never say for sure." He looked at her a moment.

"Grampa, you haven't answered me yet."

"What?" asked the old man, apparently concerned.

"Who created the Grove?" she asked, now a bit annoyed.

"Ohhh. Here's where your answer comes, Delendra. Each highpriest built a temple, one on each continent--"

"A what?"

He looked up for a second. "A continent is all the land that we live on. All the countries and lakes and mountains and forests exist on continents. Now, where was I? Oh yes. Each highpriest covered the temple with a huge mound, and they planted a grove of trees atop each mound. The Temple of Air lies east, on the island continent of Terasu. The Water Temple is south of us, on the continent of Mambiko. The Earth Temple lies west of here, in the land of Sukharra, and our temple is the Fire Temple. And then they created great cities near each grove. Our city is Havenshore, of course."

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from Page 2)

“So, the fire high priest made this Grove?” asked the girl.

“They all built them separately, and this one is for the element of fire. And since fire is change, and books can change our thoughts and feelings, our great library is here,” replied the old man.

“And what of the temple that they built together?” asked Delendra, in a deeper voice not normally hers. Both it and her question surprised her grandfather.

Jaen’s words came slowly, after some reflection. “If they had, then it is a great mystery. I have not read or heard any record about such an undertaking. The dragons may know—or they may not.”

“Then perhaps it has not happened yet,” was the child’s reply. “It is so difficult remembering what has and has not yet transpired,” she finished, using that same voice.

Jaen looked at his granddaughter. His mind was apprehensive. She seemed far away, though her body was here. Could she be possessed by an evil spirit? Something deeper within his spirit told him to be unafraid, however, for what she was telling him was the truth. He chose to smile and wink at her. She responded by returning to the moment, her five-year-old self once more.

“Could we ask them?” inquired the girl, as if she didn’t know what she had just said.

Jaen tried desperately to remember the conversation leading up to this point. Then, recalling, he laughed out loud. He got up with his walking stick, then bent down to kiss her one more time. “Bless your heart, Delendra. Maybe some day, if you are fortunate enough, you can ask a dragon yourself.” He kissed her softly. He then blew out the candle and wished her a good night. She responded in kind, and he shut the door to the bedroom. He made his way through the hall to the back of the abbey, where he slowly made his way down the stairs. He walked through the hearth room and into the dining area, where the rest of his companions were standing or sitting around a large rectangular table made of dark oak.

Elzivreth looked at him, sitting at one end of the table. “And you complain about me taking my time?”

“Well, you know her,” Jaen began. “I can’t just tell her a simple story anymore. She always has questions, questions, questions.”

He took his seat at the other end of the table. Istrelle and Tyrstan sat to his right, with Ailund and Liara on his left. Junithor stood on the right side, while Gertha stood on the left side, both behind those seated. All eyes were on Elzivreth.

Adilund offered Jaen a cup of hot tea from a tray in the middle of the table. He accepted it and took a sip before speaking. “So,” he began, also looking at Elzivreth, “I take it that Delendra’s birthday present turned out to be something more than you had bar-

gained for?”

“In all my years,” she began, “it was unlike any experience I have ever had. Her vision was so vivid, so intense, that I swore we were actually participating in it.”

“So you were able to experience everything she was perceiving?” asked Jaen, taking another sip of tea.

“Yes,” said Istrelle, “we were in the desert; not only did we see everything, but I could feel the heat on my flesh. I could hear voices in the crowd around us.”

“I could even smell the unleavened bread baking,” finished Elzivreth. Silence permeated the room. “Now that I think back upon it, it may have not been a vision at all. Perhaps, by some deep magick, we were actually taken to that time and place...or our souls, at least.”

“You said ‘time and place,’” mentioned Liara, turning from Istrelle to Elzivreth. “Are you saying this wasn’t happening in the present?”

“It wasn’t happening now,” answered Istrelle. “It happened sometime in the past—the recent past.”

“How do you know?” asked Tyrstan.

Elzivreth answered. “Istrelle and I experienced more than we can possibly explain. So much was happening, so quickly. It felt to me as if--”

“As if a greater intelligence were behind it all,” interrupted Istrelle, “connecting us to the thoughts and feelings of everyone there, including--”

“Including the world itself,” finished Elzivreth. The two women looked at one another, confirming what they both believed to be true.

“Now wait just a damned minute,” started Jaen. “You’re both saying that you knew everything that was happening?”

“As we were experiencing it, yes,” responded Istrelle.

“So just what in the three hells did you learn?” demanded Junithor.

Elzivreth slapped her right hand on the table. “Everyone calm down,” she ordered. “What has happened has happened. We need calm emotions and rational minds to wade our way through this.” She looked around at the others. “Am I understood?”

“Yes, Matron,” replied most, followed by a couple apologies.

“Well then, let’s start at the beginning,” proposed Adilund, folding his hands on the table. “Please tell us what unfolded.”

“Like Istrelle said, we were transported to a desert city, somewhere in the land of Sukharra. We were witnesses to a hanging. The fourth man’s noose slipped, and he was caught between life and death. It was the perfect time for them to act,” said Elzivreth.

“Who is ‘them?’” asked Jaen.

“The spirits that came to him,” responded Istrelle, “fourteen in all.”

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from Page 3)

“So, you could actually see them?” asked Jaen again.

“Yes,” replied both of the women. “They looked like columns of gray light, except for one of the spirits,” said Istrelle, “which was completely dark.”

“Why were they there? Why'd they choose that man out of everybody else in the world?” asked Tyrstan, becoming excited again.

“I received the impression that they were lost,” responded Elzivreth. “These spirits came from a distant star. They are not of our world.”

Istrelle joined in. “I think they chose Ranib—that's his name—because they were drawn to his spirit, caught between the worlds. They needed a vessel from which to carry out their wishes.” She thought a moment. “They used that splintering comet as escort to get here, but when the Spire was destroyed, they became lost, wandering to and fro until they could find someone they could use.”

“Yes,” confirmed Elzivreth, “they came to our world because the Undying One summoned them here.”

“That would make it about five years ago,” said Junithor.

“Yes,” responded Jaen, taking another sip of tea. “but that doesn't answer why they came, does it?”

“They came to explore a world of flesh and blood,” answered Istrelle. “The physicality of things was unknown to them.”

“How do you know for sure that this was related to the Spire?” asked Liara.

“Actually, this vision was the last of three that Delendra had,” replied Istrelle. “The first vision was of her mother's death, and the second was of her father's victory over the Undying One.”

“Since those two visions were of events five years ago,” added Elzivreth, “we assumed that this vision was from then, too.”

“But you also just knew, right?” asked Jaen, arching an eyebrow.

“Correct,” was her reply.

“Did you see those visions as well?” asked Adilund.

“No,” began Istrelle, “but Delendra told us about them as they were happening.”

“Then how did you see the third vision?” asked Tyrstan.

Istrelle sighed. “Delendra plunged her hands—and ours—into the seeing bowl. That's when every-thing changed.”

“So,” said Gertha, surprising everyone, “the girl has power.”

Everyone looked at her. “Don't tell me that we haven't all noticed...at one time or another,” she responded.

“No, you're right,” said Jaen, looking at Istrelle. “The problem is, she shouldn't. Other than the powers of a feyn, of course.”

Istrelle met his gaze. “I have concluded that she is an ancient soul. But she's still a little girl, too. She's a part of our family.”

“I think that is why Maralyth sent her here, with you,” said Elzivreth. “She knew that her daughter would be in good hands with all of us.”

“Of course she's part of our family,” retorted Jaen. “I'm hurt that you would even think I would believe otherwise. Yes, she's a little girl. We have to give her love and structure and discipline and un-derstanding so that she learns to control her power—and to use it wisely. As to who she is and why she has this power, who knows? Who cares? If we tried answering questions like that all the time, we'd all end up mad.”

A long pause followed. Everyone took turns exchanging glances.

“I believe, Matron,” started Adilund, smiling sheepishly, “that you and Istrelle were telling us how the group of spirits approached this dying man, Ranib.” He looked at Istrelle, then Elzivreth. “Cor-rect?”

“Yes,” replied Elzivreth. “They gave this poor man a choice: he could either live as their vessel, or they would let him die—or worse. He obviously chose to live. Then, the spirits entered him, becoming as one. His visage changed, and then he—it--killed the guards and the executioner,” commented Elzivreth. Then, her voice went cold. “It killed them all by will alone.”

Jaen pulled out his pipe and tobacco. “By will alone, eh?” was all he said. He stuffed the pipe and then lit it.

“Yes,” spoke up Istrelle, “it's as she said. It called itself the Foreseer, and it made the judge its chief highpriest.”

“Highpriest?” asked Liara. “That would imply a religion.”

“Are you saying that this Foreseer was making a new religion?” asked Tyrstan.

“That is how it seemed,” explained Istrelle. “It told the highpriest to start converting people.”

A cool breeze swept through the room, making the candles flicker momentarily. As the breeze left, Jaen took several puffs from his pipe. He waited, smiling, until the breeze left and the candles resumed burning normally. As everyone else waited, he looked around at each soul present. Finally, he spoke. “Now, just what were we talking about again?”

Tyrstan planted his elbows on the table and dropped his head into his hands, shaking it.

Junithor rolled her eyes. “Gods, we're going to be talking about this all night.”

Istrelle rose from the table and rested her hands flatly on it. She raised her head so that all could see her. “Matron, I apologize,” she began, looking to Elzivreth. Then she turned to face Junithor and Tyrstan, then Gertha, Liara and Adilund. “First, you have to trust Delendra. Now here's the short of it. These spirits, these usurpers, don't just want to create a religion

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from Page 4)

or make others believe them. They want to rule this world—our world. They want everyone to believe that they, as this god...Ahnun...are the one true god.” She paused a moment, looking around again. “They will gain followers, and thus gain power. Anyone who refuses to believe will die, because these usurpers have the power to kill them with a thought. When they have enough worshipers, and enough power, they will come here.” She paused again to let it sink in.

“They will come, and if we are not ready,” said Elzivreth soberly, “if our world is still asleep, and their power is greater than ours...then all will be lost.”

Jaen took another couple puffs from his pipe. He looked at Istrelle. “You know I said that just so you would give us the short version,” he said at last.

Istrelle glared at the old man.

“I’m trying to tell you that I trust you,” he explained. He looked around, then back to her. “We all trust you. You have my word as Patron of this grove.” He motioned to her. “Now, please sit back down.”

Istrelle did as Jaen asked. She noticed that Adilund had a puzzled expression on his face. “What is it?” she asked him.

“I don’t wish to beleaguer a point, but did you get any sense of how far this new religion has spread? Do you know how far they may have come?” he inquired.

“No; all I know is that this happened around five years ago,” responded Istrelle.

“But it does beg a question,” said Elzivreth, her eyes brightening. She looked at the Urg. “Gertha, when the barbarians from the west attacked your people and overtook your lands, was anyone able to learn who had displaced them in the first place?”

“My people were too busy dying to ask why they were being killed,” she replied tersely.

“Fair enough,” responded the matron, lowering her eyes.

“Well, in five years’ time, they could have covered a lot of space,” spoke Tyrstan. “It could also explain why many of my kin in the Feral Lands started turnin’ on each other—tribe versus tribe, I mean.”

“When was the last time you were there?” asked Liara.

“I left there a year ago. The fightin’ and land-grabbin’ was goin’ on by then,” said Tyrstan. I was told to come here, so here I be,” he finished.

“So it’s not outside the realm of possibility that the usurpers could be the foe encringing on everyone else,”

Junithor spoke. “So, we have an enemy creeping closer and closer to us, growing in power with each new follower. The question is, what can we do?” She looked at Elzivreth. “What do we need to do?”

“I have been pondering this for most of the day,” began the matron. “Jaen, you and I must reexamine the pillars. We must also read through the tomes and the scrolls. We may find a prophecy or two that may

help in our studies.” She then rose. “Istrelle, I need you to go to Havenshore. You must first gain an audience with the king. You must tell him what we have learned and ask if he has heard anything about any activity to the west. Secondly, you must use your talents to learn what you can from any travelers or merchants—or wandering bards, for that matter. Above all, we need to know where these usurpers are.”

“My talents?” asked Istrelle, a little incredulously. Some of her talents belonged in the past, and the matron knew it, too.

“Yes, your natural charisma and charm,” responded Elzivreth, smiling. “I can think of no one better suited than you. However, you should have someone accompany you.”

Liara rose. “It would be my honor to go with Istrelle for this mission,” she said.

“This is no mission,” began Elzivreth. “Do you expect to be lurking in the shadows, ready to kill anyone who may or may not pose a threat? I know you were an assassin before you came to us,” she continued, “and I appreciate your enthusiasm, but I think Tyrstan would be the best choice for this endeavor.”

Tyrstan perked up while Istrelle and Liara both frowned.

“Matron,” Istrelle began, “I think Liara would be fine for a traveling companion. After all, we know she can take care of herself.”

“You know I can get you there faster than anyone else,” said Tyrstan, “and I could just stay out of your way and act like any other horse.”

“The theryan is correct,” spoke the matron. “He shall go with you on the morrow.”

“Yes, Mum,” replied Istrelle. A thought occurred to her then. “But Matron, believing something and proving it are two different things entirely.”

Elzivreth looked confused. “What is your point, Istrelle?”

“If I go and talk to the merchants and travelers first, I may get the proof I need to go before the king. I doubt he will take me seriously based solely on our interpretation of a religious vision.”

“She makes a good point, Dear,” remarked the old man.

“So be it; do what you think best. But you’d better get some sleep, since you’ll be leaving at first light.” Elzivreth then addressed everyone else. “I need the rest of you to remain here and tend to your responsibilities. We have crops to reap, children to teach and people to feed and heal. And the fishermen are quite busy. I know of at least three fishing nets that need mending.”

The group said their goodnights and began to disperse. Soon, only the patron and matron remained.

“You know I can’t read worth a damn anymore,” he told her.

“You still know how to hold a torch, don’t you?” was her reply.

The two slowly rose and went off to bed.

(Continued from Page 1, Column 2)

"Prepare a full report for me to send to Starfleet ASAP, Commander," she instructed.

"Aye, Captain!" Frakes replied.

Next, she called Sickbay.

"Dr. Winn," the doctor's tired voice responded.

"Status report on T'Pell please."

"Deputy T'Pell succumbed to her injuries as of 1345 hours," the doctor said in reply. "I will have the full results of her autopsy in an hour and file my report. Her remains will be placed in stasis and upon reaching Vulcan will be immediately turned over to the authorities."

"Excellent. How's T'Shan?"

"She's her usual stubborn self and is back to full duty," Winn told her. "We both knew *that* was going to happen, and sooner rather than later."

"I'm glad you didn't lose her, Sinclair."

"So am I. She's an excellent nurse. I'll have everything to you in an hour, Captain," the doctor assured her, then signed off.

Wekk left her quarters and headed over to K'Tal's guest quarters. She buzzed, was granted entrance and found the Klingon woman immersed in reading legal documents on her desk terminal as well as making notations on several tablets.

K'Tal looked up and noticed the expression on Wekk's face. "What fresh hell has happened, as you humans like to ask,"

"T'Pell is dead," Wekk answered.

"If I weren't so bogged down with these legal briefs, I'd share a celebratory mug of War Nog with you. But alas, it will have wait," she said wistfully.

"I'll take a rain check until this mission is over, if you don't mind," Wekk offered.

"It's a date, and my treat. I'll take you to the best Klingon beer hall on Starbase 19," the Klingon woman offered in return.

"Do they have fresh Gagh?"

"Absolutely! They bring it to your table live!"

"Then it's a definite date," Wekk effused. "I'm going back to my quarters now and try to get some sleep. I nearly nodded off several times during brunch with Marisol and her grandmother. I hope she didn't notice."

K'Tal couldn't help laughing. "Children always notice, Ajasa! Don't you know those little eyes see everything?" she called to Ajasa as she left.

* * * * *

Janice awakened to the sound of Echo chirping.

"She sounds like a bird," she said.

"Thus, her name. I believe that's an Earth nightingale call she is echoing. That means she's awake and hungry."

Skonn called his dragon to him with a hand signal. Echo flew down from her hanging nest and landed flat against his face, causing Janice to sit up and laugh

hysterically.

"She also possesses a bizarre sense of humor," Skonn said as he sat up and Echo scampered to her usual place on his shoulder.

"And, who'd she get it from? I declare she's your emotional extension, Skonn. She expresses what you can't, or won't," Janice chided as she flopped back down in bed.

Skonn didn't reply aloud as he got up and fetched dragon crunchies and water for Echo.

Guilty as charged, occasionally, Janice heard in her mind. "I knew it!" she shouted.

"You must promise never to reveal that to anyone. It is a minor drawback to owning a Flyrin Dragon. Once they are bonded to you, they will occasionally ape your emotions," Skonn admitted. Then, before Janice could reply, he added, "Destiny favors you strongly."

"Yes, she does. In fact, I call her my Mini Me," Janice said. She was well aware that he'd skillfully steered her away from what was to him a bothersome subject.

"Have you noticed Destiny displaying any Augmenti traits?" Skonn asked.

"I don't know what Augmenti traits are supposed to be. She is extremely smart, and very athletic. I have noticed that she loves animals, and they love her back. It's eerie how she can make any creature do her bidding. She also has excellent tracking skills."

"How is her health?"

"She's very healthy. No lingering colds or flu's. No broken bones or typical childhood mishaps."

"What sort of education is she getting?"

"Since we live on a ranch, she attends a home-school group and sometimes *she* teaches. She is a very active and precocious child. She will drive you up the wall, especially when she finds out who you are."

"Her stepfather?" Skonn hazarded.

"No! That you are a champion hoverboarder! She's been bugging me for one, but I've refused to buy it for the past two years. I may as well bring one home with me when she meets you."

"The process of learning how to hoverboard is a progressive one. Does she know how to swim?"

"Yes. What does that have to do with...?"

"Does she know how to surf?"

"Er, no."

"To properly learn to hoverboard, one must know how to water surf. That is how I learned," Skonn informed her.

"I'm impressed." Janice said. "A Vulcan who knows how to swim and surf."

"Obviously you are not married to a typical Vulcan," Skonn stated as a simple matter of fact.

"Neither are you married to a typical Human," Janice, with a subtle smile, stated in response.

Skonn raised his right eyebrow and Janice chuckled as Echo chirped her agreement.

Fiction

Fallen Angel - Part 41

by Capt Wynan

Captain Moore arose from his bed while the sky was still dark. Henderson met him at the door along with Boomer who was busy trying to rub the sleep from his eyes.

"Boomer you gotta stop pulling double duty. You have been working on the rocket during the day and sitting up with Lillian at night. She's going to be fine," Henderson said.

"I just don't want her to wake up and need something. She still doesn't sleep through the night," Boomer said.

Henderson shook his head as he and the rest of the crew followed behind Moore in various states of wakefulness on their way out the door. A hint of light in the east was turning the dark sky rosy.

"I hope we have clear skies like Kroll said we would yesterday," Captain Moore said.

Henderson looked up at the stars still shining in the early morning sky.

The rocket slowly emerged from the darkness as they walked closer.

Several natives stood in a group a little away from the towering rocket. A single figure loomed out of the darkness a little further back.

"Kroll, are you sure there are no natives on board the ship?" Captain Moore said as he walked over to the large native.

Kroll grumbled hoarsely as he booted one of the bundles and smiled that sharp-toothed grin that always gave Captain Moore the shivers.

The bundle growled and the men could see that it was one of the natives that they had removed the previous night. Once again, they had tried to climb in the ship so they could be the first of their generation in space.

Captain Moore shook his head. If this thing goes well they will all get a chance to go up without dying. He just couldn't understand why they were so bent on doing something they knew they wouldn't survive. It wasn't for honor or glory from what Angel said when they had talked to Kroll about it in an attempt to understand why they kept on trying. Angel said that Kroll just couldn't fathom why they were in such a hurry to go.

The sun was slowly starting to show on the horizon as everyone took their places behind a hill to protect themselves from the blast of the engines.

Henderson scanned the ground around the ship and caught sight of three bound natives on the ground where Kroll had left them. "Kroll!" he barked,

The tall native turned towards Henderson who, with a scowl, was pointing at the three on the ground.

Kroll shrugged his shoulder and walked over to where they lay. He grabbed two of them, each by a foot,

and dragged them unceremoniously out of harm's way. Then he walked back and grabbed the last one by his shirt collar and dragged him away to join the other two.

Boomer sat at the empty control console on the ship wondering for the tenth time if this really was going to work. The panels in front of him glowed faintly as he went through the launch sequence he and Kroll had gone over so many times before. His fingers flew over the panel when a light suddenly began flashing. "Uh oh!" Boomer blurted.

Jaxon sat in in his room looking back through his personal data log. It had been almost two years since Moore had left his docking station. He had heard through the trader grapevine that two ships had disappeared into a wormhole. Jaxon knew if anyone could come out of it alive it would be Captain Moore and his crew. He still couldn't figure out how he had gotten that pod when no one else could. Not even he had been successful at capturing it.

A knock at the door startled Jaxon out of his musings. "Come in!" he barked.

Joe came through the door looking tired and worn. He took a seat at Jaxon's small table directly across from him.

"Well, have we found anything yet?" Jaxon asked.

Joe leaned back in his chair, let out a sigh, then rubbed his forehead with his hand before dropping it heavily into his lap. "No Sir, not yet," he replied.

Jaxon stood up brusquely enough that his chair crashed into the wall behind him. "How in the seven galaxies can we have not found anything by now? We received that ping from Moore's ship months ago!" The same ship that had shot up his cargo landing bay he recalled with a scowl.

"Sir, the men have been out there time and again trying to find any sign of Moore and his crew. I have been plotting a course and trying to narrow down the area the loose end of the fluctuating wormhole seems most likely to be in and I have narrowed it down to these three quadrants," Joe said pointing to a map on the wall.

"The three *largest* quadrants! Quadrants that would take mega-years to search! Do you realize how many planets we would have to search?! The habitable ones alone would take decades! We don't have decades!"

The door slid open and Daggett came in flushed and winded. "Sir, we have a ping!"

"Where?" Jaxon asked rushing over to the wall map and brought up a larger view of the three quadrants on a screen.

Daggett enlarged the second quadrant until it filled the screen. "Here, we got a signal from here but it's not from Moore's ship it's from Peron's ship."

Daggett, get Timwell! We are going to go out and see what in the clusters is out there. Jaxon strode out of the room and headed toward the bay to board the scout ship. "How in the blue nebula does a piece of space garbage like Peron survive and yet Moore doesn't. Jaxon's face was dark. His crew gave a wide berth as he passed by. Jaxon refused to believe it was possible and he was personally going to make sure.

Fiction

Star Wars - Ashi's Shame

Chapter 11: The Darkest Day

by LT Ashinaga

Master Roh and Ashi were seated on the floor by a small table where a pot of hot tea waited with two steaming cups, one in front of each person. Roh savored the aroma of the tea while Ashi merely leaned on the table in disgust at his circumstances. The Jahalan's tail tapped with irritation against the floor.

Roh took a deep sip of his tea and then let out a satisfied sigh. "A good cup of tea can settle even the most tightly wound nerves. Try some. It's a shame to let it go cold."

"I don't want any tea."

"No tea." Roh pouted, "How sad. Alright, if you're going to be that way, we'll have a philosophy session. You always loved those." Roh knew that Ashi wasn't fond of these sessions. "Ask me a question."

Ashi sighed and then thought for a moment. "Okay. We are trained warriors, right?" Roh nodded, Ashi continued. "But the Jedi are supposed to bring peace?" Roh nodded again. "So, why train warriors when you want peace?"

Roh poured a little more of the tea and took a sip before answering. "Is it not better to have a warrior in the garden than a gardener in a war?"

"I see. To be prepared for war is better than to be weak."

Roh pondered that. "True. But one might also say that a well-trained army is the greatest deterrent for war."

Ashi nodded slightly as he sloshed the tea around in his cup. "True."

Roh smiled. "Ask another question?"

Ashi thought and thought, but his mind wasn't focused on this.

Roh noticed this and asked, "What troubles you so, my young padawan?"

Ashi set the cup down and looked at the ground instead of his master. "I overheard you speaking with Master Yoda."

"I know."

This caught Ashi by surprise. "You knew I was there?"

"Yes." Roh smiled. "My young apprentice, I keep no secrets between us. What the masters say about you, you deserve to know. How else can you rise to their challenges, to meet their expectations? What of our conversation troubled you?" Roh realized that the whole conversation would bother the boy, but he needed to know what thoughts were plaguing his padawan's mind.

"That I'm weak, I'm a failure." Ashi nearly grumbled out the words.

"No one called you a failure. Weak perhaps, but we are all weak to begin with. It is only through training and focus that we grow. When one begins his training believing he knows it all and is strong enough, he won't learn anything. Your weakness is not a failure, it's merely a starting place for the day in which you will be strong."

Ashi scowled. "No. I know my limitations. I'm a weak Jedi. I should never have come to the temple to train. Without a lightsaber, I can't ever take the tests and will never be a knight. I have failed you, master."

Roh calmly used the force to bring Ashi's teacup over to his hand. "The tea is cold."

Ashi gave his master a funny look, "So?"

"Do you think the cup blames itself for letting the tea get cold?"

Ashi wasn't getting it yet, though he had learned to expect these sorts of wisdom lessons from Roh, "No. The tea got cold because it just gets cold."

Roh took the pot with his other hand. "It is the pots responsibility to keep the tea hot." He poured a little more into the cup, warming up the cold tea. "The cup is now ready with fresh tea." He used the force to slide the cup back to Ashi. "As your master, it is my duty to fill you with knowledge and skill. Have I failed you?"

Ashi quickly shook his head, "No, master, never. You've taught me so much. It is I who have failed you."

"But, you are the cup. It is not your duty to make the tea hot, only to accept the hot tea. Accept my training. Don't let it grow cold because you feel you're a failure. See where your strengths are and continue to work on them. In time, those strengths will give way to other strengths."

"What strengths?!" Ashi retorted.

"You are impressive with your swords, one of the best fighters I've seen using two blades. In the training room, when you use the mock lightsabers, you are quite skilled. Just because you haven't built your first lightsaber doesn't mean that you're weak. It means that destiny has a different schedule than you." Roh was getting more animated about this, he knew his apprentice felt this way and it was time to cure that.

"But..."

"No." Roh stopped him. "You're a good listener and student. You absorb knowledge well and impress me with your wisdom." This compliment coming from the great Master Roh was rare indeed. Roh smiled warmly. "Your time will come; I have seen this. Master Yoda believed it so much that he journeyed with two other masters all the way back to your planet just to bring you here. Trust in the force, it will guide you to your destiny."

Ashi had never heard the visions Yoda or Roh had about him. He was aware there was something there, but he didn't dare ask. It was time. "Master Roh, what have you seen about me? What has Master Yoda seen?"

Before Roh could answer, there came a lot of screaming, blaster fire, and explosions in the temple.

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from Page 8)

The room shook hard, knocking the tea cups over.

"What was that?!" Ashi asked.

Roh got up and pulled out his own lightsaber. "I don't know. I fear that the temple is under attack. You, find the younglings and protect them. I must go find out what is happening."

"But, master. What..."

"Do not argue with me, Padawan. Go." Roh left the room quickly as a second wave of explosions rocked the temple.

"I don't want to see this," Ashi spoke from outside his vision.

"You must face your pain, or it will forever haunt you," Roh responded.

They both watched as a young Ashi retrieved his dual blades and ran for the area where the younglings would be kept safe. To his left and right, he watched as the unimaginable happened, clone troopers attacked and killed members of the Jedi temple.

Ashi turned a corner to find one of the eldest members of the temple lying on the ground in a pool of her own blood. Other Jedi were scattered around, all the very old men and women who were now the sages of the temple, teachers and providers of wisdom, not the skilled fighters. They had lightsabers and great knowledge of the force, evidenced by the amount of clone troopers that had fallen around them in the fight. But, ultimately they were unable to withstand the sheer numbers and met their end.

For the first time since he came to the temple, Ashi's hands holding his blades were trembling. His heart pounded and he knew a deep fear. He dashed for the room where the younglings would be, praying he could stand against the forces attacking right now. He heard screams of pain as troopers and Jedi both killed one another.

Just before he reached the chamber he heard a familiar voice yelling. He stopped and looked up in horror as he watched Master Roh fighting against a dozen troopers. The aged master of wisdom held his ground with amazing results. He took them all on and was out-matching every shot. For a fat old man, he took down six in less than a minute. The other six were cut apart just as quickly. Roh stopped to catch his breath and noticed his padawan watching in amazement, he actually smiled.

A dark hooded figure appeared near Roh and attacked him with a lightsaber. Ashi gasped and stepped back. Another Jedi attacking the temple? He sensed something terrible, cold, agonizing, this wasn't a Jedi master, it was a Sith.

Roh fought well, keeping up with the Sith warrior. Ashi was ready to rush in and help when suddenly the Sith caught one lucky stroke and chopped Roh's lightsaber in two. Without missing a beat, the monster stabbed his lightsaber into the old master. Roh fell to the ground in a dead heap.

Ashi couldn't even scream at the sight. He wanted

to avenge his master, but he knew he would never be able to fight a Sith lord truly effectively with his pathetic blades and meager skills.

He found the room where the children were. Behind him, he could sense that cold darkness approaching quickly. The Sith was coming in his direction. On the ground, before the door, were three Jedi masters. One of whom was the librarian who oversaw the massive archives. All three were dead, but the door had not been opened.

Ashi looked back, knowing that dark figure was about to round the corner. He made his decision and dropped both blades. He laid down among the dead and closed his eyes. In his mind, he desperately prayed that his limited talents would not alert this Sith lord to his presence. He would be presumed as one of the dead. His jaw quivered and his heart raced, but he managed to keep still enough.

The dark man stepped right over him, shoving aside another body to get to the door. He opened it and walked in.

"No, I can't. Please don't make me." Ashi, in the real world, was crying like a child now.

"You must!" Roh demanded.

While Ashi remained still on the ground, he wrenched and writhed at what his sensitive ears were hearing. Tears filled his eyes and he cried hard.

In the real world, Ashi was calling out, "What have I done! The screaming, I can't stand the screaming! Please, make it stop!" He bawled, "Please, oh please, I don't want to hear those kids screaming!"

"Stay in the vision," Roh commanded. "What happened next?"

Ashi, in the vision world, slowly sat up and looked back at the sealed doors. The horrid sounds of a lightsaber striking came again and again. Small voices cried out in agony and fear. He was blubbering and weeping. He reached down and picked up his swords. For a moment he considered facing this Sith lord as he walked out, but that moment passed. He turned and ran.

Ashi rounded the corner and ran toward his fallen master. Roh was dead, all that remained was the lightsaber that had been destroyed. Ashi picked up the pieces and put his hand on Roh's chest; then he put his forehead against Roh, crying. "I'm sorry, master, I failed."

His head snapped up and his ears tilted, that dark presence was on the move. He took up his swords and Roh's broken lightsaber and got away before he could be seen.

He hid around corners and behind columns as the troopers finished executing every Jedi in the temple. It wasn't easy evading the enemy, but they were expecting resistance, not cowardly fleeing.

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from Page 9)

Running into a dark hallway Ashi bolted for one of the smaller landing pads near the temple's exterior. He left the temple and found a shuttle stationed outside. It belonged to one of the old masters who hadn't left Coruscant in decades. He ran inside and found R1-77 still attached to the astromech station.

Slapping the droid he asked, "Does this ship still work?"

R1 activated and looked around, beeping at him with several disgruntled noises.

"No, your master's dead, they're all dead. We need to leave before that Sith lord finds us. Does this ship still work?"

R1 checked the connection and then gave off a short beep to indicate yes.

Ashi jumped into the pilot's seat. "Then get the engines working. We have to get off this planet."

The shuttle lifted off and jumped into hyperspeed before it left the planet's atmosphere.

Ashi checked the communication system, "I can't raise anyone. The Jedi...they're all quiet." He didn't send out any signals for fear of being tracked, but if any other Jedi were calling for help he would pick it up. The Jedi com signals were all dead.

R1 beeped at him, asking where they were going.

Ashi set the nav controls, "The only place I have left to go. Home."

Ashi opened his eyes and took a moment to gather himself. His hands were shaking and his face was soaked. He ran his hands under each of his eyes to wipe away some of the tears.

He looked up to the ghost of his master, "Now you know my shame. You know that I failed the Jedi that day. I cannot stand up against a Sith. That's why I ran then, that's why I ran away from the village back there."

Roh answered, "I always knew what happened that day. I was there."

Ashi frowned, "You died before I ran away from the temple."

"Yes. But, I didn't die before you laid down to hide from that Sith Lord. I could tell what you were doing. It was not by your inadequate talent that he didn't sense you, I used my final strength to hide you. My life left me after he stepped over you, but if I had not hidden you, he would have known you were there and killed you."

Ashi was stunned. "You...you protected me. But, I should have stood and faced him. I was supposed to protect the children, and I didn't. I was a coward."

Roh stroked his beard. "Courage isn't giving up your life in a pointless battle against an opponent you will in all certainty, lose to. Courage is facing your fears and overcoming them. I realized then that that Sith lord was stronger than you. He was one of the most powerful adversaries I had ever faced. I was almost dead and knew you wouldn't survive long. I couldn't stand the thought of him killing you. When

you laid down and hid, I was relieved. I did all I could to make sure your ploy worked."

"You were relieved?" Ashi repeated this idea, confused and a bit angry.

"Yes. I cared about you, young padawan. You've lost so much in your life and yet remained an honest, good man. It wasn't right to let your life end in such a pointless way."

"But, I was a coward. I ran. I watched my friends die all over the temple while I slunk through shadows to find the nearest escape. This is not the way of the Jedi."

Roh shook his head and pointed at Ashi, "The way of the Jedi is wisdom. Wisdom is knowing when to fight and when to run."

"I have tried to convince myself of that logic many times," Ashi admitted. "I realized it wouldn't have mattered if I faced him. His lightsaber would cut right through my blades. It would've been over in a matter of seconds and I would be dead and those younglings would still be dead. But, I can still hear their screams in my sleep. I can still smell the stench of burnt flesh. I cannot get over the hate in my heart, the fear, the cowardice."

Roh stood up. "That is what you are here for. That is what this quest is all about. Your trial is not only to prove your worthy of the title as Jedi Knight but also so that you can defeat your biggest foe."

Ashi stood up quickly and pointed back toward the village, "I can't face that Sith!"

"Your biggest foe is you," Roh said, "That hatred is not directed at anyone but you; that fear is of yourself, that cowardice is the fruit of both of those feelings. You must continue and be prepared to face the trial when it comes."

Ashi frowned, "In these mountains?"

"The force works in mysterious ways sometimes. It has prepared your path, you must follow it. Otherwise, you'll forever be haunted by those dark dreams and that hatred you feel. It will consume you if you do not confront it."

Ashi sat back down. "What if I don't want to face it?"

"The choice is yours to make. But, know that the choices you make will have consequences."

"I know. I just don't know if I am ever truly going to be able to conquer my fears."

Roh calmly answered, "Rest. Calm yourself. When you wake tomorrow, make your choice." With that, he vanished away.

Ashi slowly scrunched his knees up to his chest and held his arms around them. He was cold in the evening air, but he was too depressed to go and get firewood. He stared at the ground and pondered what he would do. Going forward was the right path, but the closer he came to the end of this journey, the harder it would be. No doubt that that Sith lord would be searching for him the whole time.

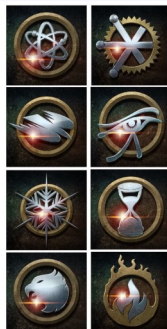
Right now he could not sense anyone near him, and he was terribly tired after that ordeal. He needed sleep.

Brain Benders

ACROSS

1. *Original captain of the Waverider, with 5D
4. "Now hear ___!"
8. *Former League of Assassins member, with 67A
12. Container weight
13. Em, to Dorothy
14. Milky gems
16. TV's "American ___"
17. Ancient Peruvian
18. *Legends persona of 8A, with 45A
19. Calendar page
21. Oompah sounder
23. Privy to
24. U.S. Naval Acad. grad
25. Done with
27. Silent assent
29. Trade punches
30. Trait transmitter
31. Spring mo.
34. *See 12D
37. *Legends persona of 34D, with 43A
38. Regulus's constellation
39. Gross
40. Interminably long time
41. Food thickener
42. 4D follower
43. *See 37D
45. *See 18A
47. Cognizance
48. Just manage, with "out"
49. Bargain
50. Hawaiian garland

51. First light
52. ___ Khan
55. Prefix with sailing
58. Catch
60. Brilliance
62. Mountain ridge
64. Pack down
66. ___ habilis
67. *See 8A
68. Golden ___ (Nabisco cookie)
69. Psst" alternative
70. 1922 Physics Nobel
71. Funeral heap
72. *Former Starling City based technologies company CEO, with 49D

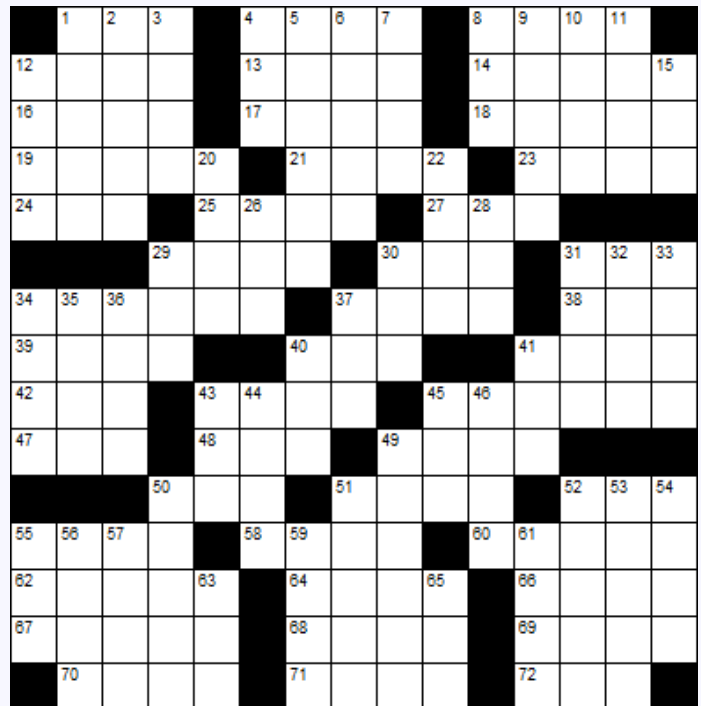


DOWN

1. Radioactive gas
2. Brand makers
3. Trapper's prize
4. 42A preceder
5. *See 1A
6. Bring upon oneself
7. Bayonet
8. Boar's mate
9. Garden pest
10. Precipitation
11. Prefix with cumulus or

- stratus
12. *Occupation of 1A before going rogue, with 34A
15. D.C. V.I.P.
20. Crosby's "Road" partner
22. "___ Karenina"
26. Alt. spelling
28. Kind of bran
29. Pig's digs
30. Lair
31. Pond organism
32. Bosc or Bartlett
33. *See 34D
34. *Arsonist from Central City, with 33D
35. Be sore
36. Scrape, as the knee
37. Tiller's tool
40. Christmas ___
41. Carpenter ___
43. Like a bairn
44. Comparable (to)
45. Crow's call
46. Clearasil target
49. *See 72A
50. Gate fastener
51. Personal journal
52. Island greeting
53. Tasting like wild meat
54. *Legends persona of 72A, with "the"
55. Chum
56. Kuwaiti, e.g.
57. City near Lake Tahoe
59. At the summit of
61. Blacken, as steak
63. Suffix with musket
65. "Annabel Lee" poet

ESB Crockett's Spirited Crossword Puzzle *21st Cen. Superheroes and Supervillains Destined to become... Legends - Part 1 by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa - July 2017



Answers to Previous Puzzle

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



More Brain Benders

SUDOKU PUZZLE

July 2017

Medium Symmetrical

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to June's Sudoku Puzzle
Easy Symmetrical

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

WORD SEARCH

July's Topic: Neil McDonough Roles

Look for 29 character names

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to June's Word Search:
Tom Cavanagh Roles

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

Brain Benders

Word Search

July's Word List:

Astroblast	LA Jim
Bison	Liam
Casey Oaks	Lt. Hawk
Craig	Lurch
Damien Darhk	Ned Dwyer
Eddie	Officer Bower
Ford	Oliver Queen
Green Arrow	Peter Gish
Hogan	Pvt. Reich
Hurly	Rick
Jack Freed	Sheriff
Jason	vega
Jonah Pope	Vincent
Keech	Wyatt Cain
King Aramis	

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