



# Crockett's Spirit

*Impavidus Scribere Veritas — The Brave Write the Truth*



Volume 5 Issue 8

August 2017

## Fiction

### The Alfore Encounter - 47

"The Old Man"

by CAPT Two Wolves

It had been a very busy day in the VIP quarters where the Gomez family, plus, had been staying. In addition to caring for Victoria, and the Track Cats, Shara spent three hours with K'Tal discussing her upcoming case on Vulcan.

The Klingon woman proved herself more than capable of handling the legal technicalities of the trumped up charges which had been brought against Shara. Privately, Shara pitied the opposition.

Immediately upon returning to the V. I. P. quarters Shara was looking forward to some quality rest. However, that was not to be.

"Did you hear the news?" Tony asked.

"Unfortunately, no." Shara responded. She'd been far too busy to catch up on the ship's scuttlebutt. Her husband, however was a gossip hound and tended to behave like an over excited puppy over any bit of juicy news he received. Judging from his current excitement level, this had to be a biggie.

"Deputy T'Pell is dead," he stated.

"What were the circumstances?" Shara asked, even though she couldn't care less.

"She faked some kind of fainting spell, and Doctor Winn sent a Vulcan nurse to examine her. During the examination, T'Pell attacked the nurse. The nurse defended herself in order to prevent her own demise.

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## Fiction

### Vanthea: Tyranny's Dawn

Book 2 - The Foreseer

by LTJG Star Eagle

**Four and a half years ago...**

JIBRAL STOOD ON the worn steps of the ancient stone temple, looking out toward the city square and the oasis within. Great palm trees lined it, giving shade to needy travelers and laborers as well as precious water. He remembered a legend he'd heard in childhood, how either the temple first rose as a small shrine to give thanks for the oasis...or how the old gods loved the shrine so much that they placed the oasis here as a sign of their contentment.

Merchants' stands and buildings lined the square, and the far side beyond the oasis housed the justice hall and its own courtyard, used to dispense that justice by the sword, arrow and the noose. It was the very same courtyard where both he and Ranib had been sentenced to die just half a year ago.

How things had changed.

Small groups of people filled the square, not in meeting or prayer, but in bloodshed. The Children of Ahnun were systematically killing the infidels. It had taken this long for the Foreseer to attract as many loyal fanatics as it needed to attempt this overthrow of the city. It would have taken twice as long had Evor L'rahk not been here to make the necessary converts.

Many of the infidels were fighting back with swords, daggers, staffs and spears. Jibral could see that the operation was not going as smoothly as they had hoped. Deep within him, however, he was hoping that the "infidels" would win, bringing an end to this madness. He knew not what had happened to Ranib, only that his friend was no longer in control of himself. The Foreseer was now in control, an amalgamation of the spirits who had entered Ranib's body at his own desperate behest. Jibral could count on one hand the number of times when

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T'Pell perished as a result of those self-defense injuries," Tony said.

"Deputy T'Pell's behavior was illogical to the point of insanity," Shara responded. "Her willingness to place Victoria, myself, and her own crew in danger was a sure sign of a total psychological breakdown. As far as I'm concerned, she received her due diligence. As one of my Academy instructors used to say, play stupid games, win stupid prizes. Now, I must rest, Tony." She then retreated to the shared bedroom, taking a sleeping Victoria with her.

*Ouch!* Tony thought as he watched the door close behind her.

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"Grandma, Captain Wekk fell asleep twice during brunch," Jessica said.

"Yes, I noticed that too, Jessica," Marisol responded. "The Captain is a very busy woman. She's responsible for 250 lives, and the safety of this big ship. Though she has many assistants and crew members, the final decisions always rest with her. I don't think she's able to get much rest because of that."

"I don't think I want to be a starship captain, Grandma. I like to get my sleep," Jessica told her.

"Also, being a starship captain is a about sacrifice, Jessica. Some starship captains have sacrificed their very lives and the lives of their crew, to protect the known universe from powerful enemies. Remember the history lesson your class studied about the battle of Wolf 359?" Marisol asked.

"Yes, the Borg. Thousands died and forty starships were lost," Jessica replied. "What a terrible loss of life."

"Had not those captains and crews courageously given their lives, Earth would be under Borg rule today," Marisol continued. "It's a captain's responsibility to lead their crew into battle, even if it may mean extreme loss of life."

"Being a starship captain is not so glamorous as everyone thinks it is," Jessica lamented.

"No it is not. And it's not for the faint of heart."

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K'Tal and Ajasa had worked out together, eaten and were now playing a leisurely game of Fizbin. Actually, this was the third game. K'Tal had won the first game, Ajasa the second, so this was the tie breaker.

"Lieutenant Grumman to Captain Wekk..."

Ajasa tapped her comm pin. "Wekk here."

"Captain, we're being hailed by the USS Bozeman."

"Did they mention a reason, Lieutenant?"

"No, Captain. The message is for your eyes only," was the clipped response.

"Tell them I'll take it in my ready room in five minutes," Ajasa said, then she laid her round Fizbin

cards aside and rose to leave.

"Ajasa, The Bozeman is the old man's flagship" K'Tal stated.

"He's going to Vulcan? I thought he'd been placed on medical travel restrictions because of his age," Ajasa said, dismayed.

"Baloney! He's healthy as a Vulcan horse and travels whenever and wherever the hell he wants to. Captain Hemmingway-Gomez's case is the trial of the century and he wouldn't miss it for the universe," K'Tal asserted.

"If he's going to be there, you'd better be on your best behavior in the court room, K'Tal. That means no head butting the prosecutors," Ajasa teased.

"Oh my! I'm offended! I'm going to file an EEO complaint against you for insulting my Klingon heritage!" K'Tal stated, as she placed her left hand dramatically against her breast, and then laughed.

"File it in The Great Void for all I care," Ajasa joked back, as she exited the Klingon's V. I. P. quarters.

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As soon as Wekk seated herself behind her desk, she hailed the USS Bozeman.

"Please hold." She was told by the female Castellain communications officer.

Instantaneously, comm officer's feline visage was replaced by that of a stern Vulcan male. Like fine wine, Vulcans tended to get better with age. Though his hair and eyebrows were pure white, his eyes sparkled with youth, intelligence and intensity.

"Admiral Stull! Please forgive me. I didn't expect to see you," Wekk said, pretending to be shocked.

"Nor did I intend for anyone to know my whereabouts," Stull replied. I merely wished to check the status of Commander Hemingway as I heard there was a minor disturbance on board."

"The incident took place in the brig. Deputy T'Pell lost her life. The nurse she assaulted, T'Shan has fully recovered. I'll send you a copy of my report," Wekk told the admiral. She wondered how he'd heard the news. She hadn't filed an official report with Starfleet yet. "Commander Hemingway is safe and sound in the VIP quarters along with her husband, daughter, extended family and Track Cats," Wekk added.

"Indeed," Stull replied, right eyebrow raised. "Then I will have someone arrange for proper accommodations for them on Vulcan. Also, give a copy of your report to K'Tal. She will need it."

"Aye. Is there anything else, Sir?"

"Negative. As you humans are so fond of saying, this conversation never occurred," stull advised her as he raised his right hand in the Vulcan salute.

"Aye, Sir," Wekk replied and returned his salute, albeit awkwardly.

*One day I'm gonna have to learn how do that thing properly...without having to tie my fingers back!* Wekk thought to herself.

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Ranib's spirit had fought his way out to talk to his friend for a few precious minutes at a time. Those episodes had become less frequent and shorter in duration each time they had happened. Ranib had told him once that it was like being trapped in a dream where he could experience everything, but he could control absolutely none of it.

Jibral noticed movement to his right, from the north perimeter of the square. The red-clad Padishar guards had finally come, protectors of the city's prince and ruling assembly, brandishing their longspears and scimitars. A few archers took aim at the fanatics and hit their marks. Then, to his left, he noticed a group of men wearing spiked leather, if any, carrying swords, nets, tridents and other weapons. At first he thought they were mercenaries; they were not uncommon in cities such as this. He realized, however, that they were in fact gladiators who had come from the arena and its surrounding training grounds. They fanned out and individually attacked the fanatics, always hunting for glory as well as freedom.

This is when the highpriest appeared from the shadows of the oasis. Evor L'rahk walked confidently to the Padishar guards, his white robe with black geometric patterns flapping in the breeze. He seemed unphased by the arrows that nearly hit him. In his hands he carried a tall staff made of black wrought iron. Atop the staff lay two squares bisecting one another, and inside the squares, just touching the edges, were two circles. Within this structure lay a crystal orb, brightly pulsating with milky white light.

As the guards ran toward him, he brandished his staff, planting it firmly on the ground. He then spoke words of magick, words that the Foreseer had taught him to speak. White hot lightning arced from the crystal orb, attacking the first line of guards in a chain. All eight of them fell down immediately, now just smoldering heaps of char. The remaining guards reeled back in terror. The pulsating orb dimmed a bit.

The highpriest gazed upon them. "Hear the Four Truths given to the Foreseer by the one true god Ahnun," he began. "There is but one true god, Ahnun, the creator of all things. Only His word is truth, and in Him is true righteousness."

The guards looked at one another hesitantly. Their mission was to attack at all costs, but this man held terrible power.

L'rahk continued. "The Lord Ahnun speaks his word through His Foreseer. Only the Foreseer can interpret the true will of Ahnun, which he shall give to the Lord's priests to tell the people."

The captain of the guard flashed opened his eyes wide twice so that the other guards could see and thus would know the new plan of attack.

"Ahnun has given us His word, which is His law, to save us from the lies and sins of false gods. Only His law will restore us unto the path of righteousness from the paths of damnation," spoke the highpriest.

Two groups of guards, half a dozen each, went around slowly to out flank the highpriest, while the others in front very covertly got their weapons ready to

strike. Their attack from the front would be suicide, but the decoy could allow the other two groups to be successful. At least, that's what the captain hoped.

"The law is truth. The law is life. The law is power. The law is victory." The highpriest then spoke more magick. This time, a ring of light emanated from the orb. As soon as it touched each group of surrounding guards, it held them rigidly in place, the orb getting slightly dimmer and dimmer.

"Do you accept these words as the one and only truth?" L'rahk began. "Do you confess the holy name of Ahnun, turning to His law and righteousness, turning away from your false and deceitful gods?"

Three gladiators made their way to L'rahk, but they were soon intercepted by small groups of fanatics attacking so ferociously as if they were defending their own fathers.

The highpriest directed his questions to the gladiators as well. "Do you vow to follow and keep His law as your path of righteousness, submitting yourself to the authority and discipline of His Foreseer and priests should you turn away from Him?" He noticed the power of the orb waning; the guards were regaining some control over their own bodies, moving slowly, as if they were drugged.

"Pray for strength, children of the one true God," declared L'rahk to the dozens of fanatics still in the square. The ones not engaged in mortal combat fell to their knees in supplication. "May the prayers of the faithful empower your humble servant to carry out your will, Lord Ahnun," he said, gazing toward the heavens. Within seconds, the orb shone brightly once again, trapping the guards securely. Now there was just one more question left.

"Do you vow to spread the truth of Ahnun to all others?" demanded the highpriest, shifting his gaze directly to the captain of the guard. "What say you?"

The captain met L'rahk's gaze with a fierce, burning hatred. "Piss off, you pig-fucker," he managed to utter through the control of the ring of light. "This city will never--"

"So be it," interrupted the highpriest, tapping the staff to the ground once. The ring of light ceased to be. He then spoke one word, and the staff shot out a beam of bluish light that hit the captain, disintegrating him instantly.

Evor L'rahk looked to the next guard. "What say you?" he asked, smiling, in an eerily pleasant manner. The next guard threw his weapon on the ground. "Yes," was all he said. The remaining guards followed suit. Wearing the same eerie smile, the highpriest turned around to face the gladiators. "And you?" he asked.

The gladiators stood silent for a moment. One of them, an older man in his forties—a veteran gladiator with several scars and an ornately engraved khopesh, finished pulling it out of a fanatic he had just killed. "If I do as you ask," he began, matter-of-factly, "what's in this for me, other than my life being spared?"

The highpriest looked surprised. "The salvation of your soul, of course! What greater reward is there than to live forever in a perfect world?"

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Through the highpriest's speech, the gladiator kept gesturing with his hand in a circle. "Yes, yes, blah blah blah. Ahnun is the one true god, of course. Really, priest, do you think to be the first man who's ever said this kind of shite before?"

L'rahk spoke yet another word of magic, waving the staff toward the gladiator and then pulling it back. As he did this, the gladiator's tongue tore and flew out of his mouth. He yelled in pain and surprise, putting his free hand to his mouth.

"God cannot be mocked!" exclaimed the highpriest. "Since you dared to show such disrespect, you shall be able to speak such offenses no longer." L'rahk looked around. "A believer in name only is no believer at all!"

The gladiator raised his khopesh. It would have glinted except that it was still covered in blood. As he took a step forward to end the highpriest's life, however, three equidistant prongs shot through his chest from behind. He dared to look surprised as he fell to the ground. A younger gladiator pulled his tri-spear out of the veteran's back. This man's black metal helmet hid all of his features except for his piercing gray eyes. His spiked leather harness and bracers granted him the freedom of movement he needed to fight expertly, and his open areas revealed a musculature pitted with scars from years of rigorous training and grueling bloodshed. He planted his tri-spear in the ground, gripping it with his right hand as he lowered himself to one knee.

"He would have killed you," was the first thing he said, followed by "I believe."

"He may have," replied the highpriest.

"I am a believer," the gladiator clarified.

L'rahk smiled. "I am relieved, for I do not want to kill such as fine a warrior as you."

"Nor I, you," was all he said.

"Rise and remove your helm," ordered the highpriest. The gladiator did as he was told. Though his skin was olive-complected, like everyone else, his hair was purest white. He had its waves parted in the front, and the waves ended in little baby curls just below his neck.

"My, you are...unique. What is your name, my son?"

"Shizaren, m'lord," the gladiator responded. He could not have been more than twenty-five years old, by L'rahk's estimate. He took a moment to size up the young man. He then looked out to the battle still playing out around them. Finally, he turned his gaze back to Shizaren. "Do you lead these gladiators?" he asked.

"I just killed the one we had," Shizaren replied flatly.

"Can you lead these men?" the highpriest asked next.

Shizaren thought for a second before speaking. "I do not know, m'lord. Though we train together, we fight separately, each for his own honor, fame and glory. And money," he added as an afterthought.

L'rahk saw a couple other gladiators nearby who had stopped to see what had been going on, and to listen. "You...and you: would you follow this man to even greater honor and glory?" he asked them.

They both looked at one another briefly, then they shot their gazes back to the highpriest. "Yes," they both

replied.

"And can you convince your brethren to do the same?" asked L'rahk.

The one on his right aimed his shortsword at his staff. "Well, if we can't, I bet you sure as hells could with that," he responded.

The highpriest chuckled. "Yes, it is excellent at motivating people," he commented. He turned back to Shizaren. "I need you to do something for me, something that will prove if your loyalty be true or false."

"Name it, m'lord," Shizaren said.

"Take your two companions and go find the prince and the Padishar assembly. I want them brought here, untouched. Do you understand?"

"Certainly." He put his helmet back on.

The men began to walk off toward the direction of the hall of justice. L'rahk started to walk toward Jibral and the temple. He thought of something, though, and turned around again to speak to the gladiators. "Shizaren," he spoke loudly.

The young man turned around. "Yes, m'lord?"

"I want their children brought here, too," said the highpriest. Shizaren simply nodded once, his cold, gray gaze never wavering. He turned back to where he was going and then headed off.

Evor L'rahk gingerly made his way through the bloodshed and chaos to the base of the steps of the old temple, where Jibral was now standing. They both looked at the large, post-and-lentil structure, its huge blocks made of cream-colored limestone and beige sandstone. Its two imposing doors, made of gray granite with black iron hinges, were closed but not locked. Jibral knew this because he saw the Foreseer enter the temple just before the chaos outside began.

"How long has he been in there?" asked the highpriest.

"About half an hour, I'd say," replied Jibral. He had walked with the Foreseer up to the doors, but it had told its advisor to remain outside. To Jibral, this was just as well. At first, he'd heard the sounds of terrible and awesome magickal forces being unleashed. As these sounds subsided, he began to hear the screams, so horrific and so loud as to pierce even these great stone doors. That is when he decided to move away, back down to the base of the steps. He shuddered at the thought of what was going inside.

"Do you think it is time to join him?" asked L'rahk.

"The scr--" Jibral interrupted himself. "It's silent in there. I think we can go in now."

As if they had heard his statement, the granite doors opened outward, just enough to let a man through.

"There's our answer," said the highpriest. He moved past Jibral to the top of the steps, and he opened the doors a bit more. Then, he went into the darkness.

Jibral walked up the stairs and slowly entered the temple's main chamber. He remembered coming here as a boy, with his father, when this structure was the temple of Ardu. He hadn't come back in years. Before that, his father told him, it was the temple of Selkh. And before that, the priests of Udum had held it. Jibral didn't know any more than that, but he was trying to think of

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about as many little details as he could so he wouldn't have to pay attention to the slaughter that lay before him.

The temple was dimly lit, with torches and a small square opening in the roof to let in the light of the sun. Even so, it was enough to see what the Foreseer had wrought. In the sunken area of this immense chamber, among the four large stone square columns defining the borders of this area, lay seven mutilated bodies, the grisly remains of the seven priests and priestesses who had done nothing to deserve this except refusing to believe the lies of the Foreseer.

The first priest had been drawn and quartered, except that Jibral could see no evidence of horses or even ropes. The second corpse, a male, was naked. This poor man's head had been ripped off his neck and had been shoved part way into his own anus, his face forever in an expression of shock. The third victim, a woman, had been flayed alive. The fourth and fifth, a man and a woman, had had their genitals and breasts ripped off of their own bodies; his were shoved into her mouth, and hers in his. Her two breasts were now caps on their lifeless heads. Jibral kept walking, slower and slower, trying to keep his eyes on L'rahk and the Foreseer, who was resting atop the altar just beyond the two far pillars. He wanted to cry, to sob, but he dared not show compassion or the slightest hint of sympathy for these lost souls. On his left he passed the remains of a man whose brains and intestines were hanging outside his body, and they looked as if someone or something had eaten away at them. He turned away, for he could not face what he knew he had just seen.

Then he saw the seventh victim, a woman, who was, amazingly, still alive. Her eyes had been gouged out, her nose cut off, and her tongue removed. Even her fingers and toes were missing. Though the lobes of her ears were gone, she could still hear Jibral's gasp. As she bled out, she reached her left arm out to him. He knelt down beside her. "I cannot help you," was all he could muster. With her left palm she made a slicing motion across her neck. Jibral closed his eyes as he pulled out his dagger. "Yes," he said, quietly, and then ran the blade across her neck in one swift motion. She gasped once as the blood from her arteries spilled out—as her soul escaped—and then she was gone.

Jibral moved away from her body, just far enough to do what he had to do. On his hands and knees, he promptly vomited. As he rose, the stench of death came to him, and he vomited again. Finally he regained his composure enough to join the others.

L'rahk was kneeling down beside their master. The Foreseer sat on the floor with its back against the altar. Blood dripping from its mouth and chin, Jibral saw that it appeared to be in a state of ecstasy. It had its eyes closed and its mouth open in a smile.

Jibral approached it. "Foreseer, the prince of the city and the Padishar assembly will be here soon," he spoke, hiding as much emotion as he could.

The Foreseer opened its eyes and looked at him. "I have savored...such pleasures," it said, still smiling.

"The advisor is correct, my lord," spoke L'rahk, somewhat hesitantly. "You should meet them outside so that the entire city may behold what happens next."

The Foreseer got up. "Then I may assume that our forces have taken over the city?" it asked, turning its head to the highpriest.

"Yes, Foreseer. Even some of the Padishar guards and the gladiators have chosen to follow the truth. Before this day is done, we shall have a mighty army indeed," he assured the Foreseer.

It turned to Jibral. "Does what I have done offend you?" it asked him, as if it wanted to provoke a response.

Jibral bowed his head. "No, Master. You will do as you wish, as long as it is in accordance with the will of Ahnun."

"And are you suggesting that what I have done is not?" it asked.

"No, Master. You are the voice of God. If you were to do anything against His will, then you would no longer be that voice." He looked up at the Foreseer. "But you are still here, so I can only assume that what you have done falls within His will after all." He was lying, of course, but he had no choice. They both knew the truth. No "God" authorized or sanctioned this. He couldn't say this, however, just as he couldn't say a thousand other things that they all knew to be true. He didn't want to end up like the priests in this temple, after all. If he could catch this thing that was once his friend in a web of its own laws and lies, however, he would certainly try.

"I do have one question though, Foreseer," Jibral mentioned as the trio started walking through the temple toward the doors.

"And what would that be, Advisor?"

"The Law of Ahnun says that we must kill the infidel, correct?"

"If I may, my lord," spoke up the highpriest.

"Please," it replied.

"If a man hears the truths of Ahnun and rejects them, even after years of service, or when first hearing these truths, then he is an infidel. He and his lies must be destroyed so that the truth may flourish," he explained.

"Oh yes, I understand that," responded Jibral, "but could we not gather even more followers if we gave them the chance to let these truths sink in? After all, a man may change his mind tomorrow if he can see the truths in works as well as words."

They passed beyond the doors. Beyond them and beyond the steps were the prince of the city and the Padishar assembly, all tied together in a line. Just behind them were a group of children, either silent or crying. The gladiators stood close by with their weapons ready to strike at the Foreseer's bidding. Around them, a crowd of believers had gathered, hundreds of men, women and children, many drenched in the blood of their hapless victims, former neighbors, friends and family members.

The Foreseer looked out upon the crowd, which was

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growing by the minute. It then turned to Jibral. "What you say may have merit," it began, "but priests and holy men are another matter entirely. They are not like the common man. No, they are irrevocably tainted by the corruption of their own dogmas. Do not worry yourself about them, Jibral; they had it coming." It then proceeded down the steps.

L'rahk joined it and pointed out the gladiator who had helped him earlier. "My lord, I present to you Shizaren, a gladiator who, I believe, would make an excellent general. Shizaren, remove your helm," he finished.

The gladiator removed his helmet and then bowed on one knee, looking down.

"So you have brought me the leaders and their children?" asked the Foreseer.

"Yes, m'lord. It is my honor and duty to serve you, by my life or my death."

"Very good," responded the Foreseer. "Rise, Shizaren, and be my general. Train the Children of Ahnun well, and you shall always have a place at my table," it finished. Shizaren did as it asked, and then he joined Jibral and L'rahk.

The Foreseer walked closer, gazing intently at the prince. He was young—in his twenties—and had a braided beard. He was bald, with decorative tattoos on the sides of his head. He had a tunic of white silk and a burgundy cape. His boots were made of woven reeds.

As the Foreseer looked at the prince, and then each member of the assembly, the highpriest told them all the four truths and then asked the four questions. Their time of reckoning had come.

"You would ask me, and all of my associates, to forsake the gods of our fathers and mothers?" asked the prince.

"I would ask you all to forsake lies for the truth," answered the Foreseer.

"No," retorted the prince, "I think it is you who is the liar here. I don't care how powerful you are. None of us do. You come here and force us to proclaim loyalty to your god at the point of a sword. You rule through fear, and fear alone," he finished.

The Foreseer sighed. "Is this what you all believe?" he asked the assembly. Some of them nodded, all in their white linen robes, but one spoke. "We are one in this. We act as one and speak as one."

"Then you shall die as one!" exclaimed the Foreseer, raising its hands and spreading out its fingers. A globe of magical energy enveloped the prince and the assembly. As the Foreseer began moving its hands closer together, the globe began to contract. The people inside yelled as they were being pressed beside one another. The yelling turned to screaming as the Foreseer continued collapsing the globe, as their bodies were being pressed into one another. Flesh began melding with flesh, arm with face and leg with chest, as the group of eight men and women quickly turned into a grotesque collection of body parts, now all coalesced into one. Their shrieks died as quickly as they did.

The children cried and screamed, while some tried to attack the gladiators, who simply held them in place.

"Behold, the truth is in the power!" declared the highpriest. The crowd chanted it back to him. Then, they started chanting one word, slowly at first, over and over: "Ahnun."

The Foreseer motioned to Shizaren. "Bring the children."

Jibral put his hand on the Foreseer's shoulder as it turned to walk back to the temple. "Master, the children are innocent! They pose no threat to us!"

L'rahk pulled Jibral away. "Do you want them to come back to us in ten or twenty years? Do you want them to avenge themselves upon us for what we have done this day? No, they cannot be allowed to live," he finished as the Foreseer walked away. The two of them stayed back as it entered the temple, as the little lambs were being led by Shizaren to their slaughter.

The Foreseer turned around, just inside the doors. "Let the children come to me," it said, smiling.

The gladiators forced them in, and then they closed the doors.

Jibral ran. He headed through the crowd of fanatics, past the oasis, far enough away so he wouldn't have to hear their screams. He finally found himself in the old courtyard of the hall of justice, its gallows still standing.

He felt a hand on his shoulder. Startled, he turned around. Evor L'rahk had followed him. To Jibral's shock, the highpriest had a tear running down his cheek. The two men just stood for a moment, trying to understand who the other really was.

Finally, Jibral could help it no more. "He...is...a...monster!" he yelled, which quickly became a sob. "Damn him," he cried, "and damn you! And damn me, too!" he finished, falling on his knees.

L'rahk knelt down beside Jibral, putting his finger to his lips. "Of course he is!" he whispered. "But what can you or I do about it? You know what he'd do. And I am going to stay alive, no matter what." He picked Jibral and himself back up. "And I would let him dig up my mother's grave and shite on her rotted body if it meant he would let me live," he finished, still whispering.

Jibral looked at him, letting what he said sink in. "I don't even know if Ranib is still in there," he responded, his crying stopped. "There were times when I could feel he was still in control, even from inside, still influencing them—it," he said.

"But that hasn't happened in a while," answered L'rahk. "I know. Unless one of these ancient gods actually comes down to do something about it, you and I have to see this through."

Minutes passed. Back in the temple, in the body of the Foreseer, deep within its heart, the soul of Ranib cried out. It screamed and cursed in its dreamlike state, trying everything he could to get the usurpers to stop what they were doing. He could hear the children's screams, and he could feel what these monsters were doing to them through his body. Finally, the torment becoming too much, Ranib decided that he would simply give up and go to sleep.

Afterward, after every foul deed had been done, the Foreseer smiled; this is exactly what it had hoped would happen.

# Fiction

## Star Wars - Ashi's Shame

### Chapter 12: Moving Forward

by LT Ashinaga

Drak caught his breath as he leaned against a tree. He had been running for six solid hours. "Those damn cats are good trackers," he grumbled. He tried to scare some with his lightsaber, but they shot at him and he wasn't good enough to deflect laser blasts.

"How do those Jedi do it?" He glared at the seemingly useless blade. "I could cut those stupid people apart if they got close enough, but they just shoot at me."

He waited for a while, listening for sounds of the trackers. He watched down the hill and found no one coming after him any longer. They either got lost or gave up. Either way, he was in the clear.

Drak sighed in relief and continued walking, no longer running for his life. He made it about half an hour further into the trees when suddenly a laser blast nearly hit him. He looked at the smoldering hole in the nearby tree and then ducked behind a larger trunk. Another two shots were fired and he noticed something. The lasers the Jahalans used were blue, these were bright green. Then he heard a hissing sound.

"Wait! It's me." He yelled, holding a hand out from the trunk.

"Drak?" The friendly voice of Trevis hesitantly called out.

He leaned out, glad to see the tired face of the Twi'lek he had hired, beside him was Grask, the Trandoshan. Both men lowered their weapons and met their leader in the trees.

Drak could see a burn mark on the lizard scales of Grask, he had been hit. Fortunately, his kind are tough and can take a few blasts from weaker weapons. He asked, "Are you the only ones who survived?"

Trevis nodded, "They got the others. We barely made it out with our lives. Those cats are more fierce than we expected. It didn't help that they have a Jedi on their side."

Grask hissed out something in his native tongue.

Drak frowned, "You know I don't speak Trandoshan."

Trevis grunted, "I hoped you could. His translator was broken and he doesn't speak anything other than Trandoshan. I can't understand him either."

Drak looked at Grask, "Can you still understand me?"

Grask nodded and pointed at the box attached to his armor. He said something in Trandoshan and the box just buzzed.

"I guess he's saying the input is working," Trevis guessed, "it's the output that doesn't work anymore." Grask nodded furiously in agreement.

Drak looked around for a moment, "We aren't going to find that Jedi with those cats lurking around these trees. We need a plan."

Grask complained loudly in his tongue. Trevis agreed, "We can't go after him. We had ten Mercenaries and you and that Jedi was able to defeat us. Now we are down to the three of us. What do you expect?"

"I expect ten million credits," Drak answered.

Both mercenaries stopped and gawked at him. Trevis asked, "What ten million credits?"

"I hadn't told anyone yet, for fear of being stabbed in the back once we had him. But, seeing that I need your cooperation now more than ever, you should know. The Empire is paying ten million credits on the head of any Jedi. We bring back a body, they hand over a fortune. Now that there are only three of us, that means we each get a third of that."

Trevis was lost in greedy thoughts, "I'd be as rich as a Hut."

"We'd all be." Drak said, "But, it depends on one factor. Getting that Jedi."

Grask hissed something and then sneered at his inability to speak. He finally pointed at Drak's lightsaber and angrily hissed again.

Trevis translated as best as he could, "I think Grask is asking how we're supposed to fight a Jedi. You have the only lightsaber, and I can't say that any of us really know how to use it."

Drak held up the lightsaber, not activating it. "I know how to fight with this better than you think. But, I don't think that's a problem right now. When he faced my men at his home village, and when he faced me back there, he only carried some metal swords. He didn't even use a blaster. He's good, don't get me wrong, but he's not armed like a true Jedi. I suspect he lost his, or something like that."

Trevis asked, "So, what's the plan? Just go after him?"

Drak smiled as he looked at the Trandoshan, "I think that's the right plan. Grask, can you sniff him out?"

Grask patted his nose and shook his head, he waved his hands around in several directions. Trevis guessed, "You can't find him?" Grask shook his head, "You don't know how he smells?" Grask shook his head and then cocked it, then nodded. "Wait, I think I know. They all smell the same." Now Grask nodded quickly.

Drak pointed toward the hills. "He ran the other way. Get on the other side of this village and see if you can find a trail. You have tracked all sorts of bounties in your time, he's no different. Track his movements and see if you can find him. When you have him in your sights, signal me."

"And where are you going to be?" Trevis asked sarcastically.

"I'm going to his home village. If he doesn't run into the mountains like a little coward, he'll run home. If he shows up there, I'll signal you."

*(Continued on page 8)*

*(Continued from Page 7)*

Trevis got closer to Drak, to intimidate him, "Why should we trust you? If you're as good with that saber as you say, you could just kill him and leave us here to go collect that fortune for yourself."

"I'm good with this weapon, but I'm going to need back up against the rest of them. I can fight one man, but not an entire security force. Trust me, I'm no fool. Double crossing bounty hunters is not a game I play."

Grask hissed something and pointed at the sky. Drak knew what he was saying because it was on his mind too. "I know, we don't have a ship. But, I bet that Jedi does. He didn't get his training here on this third-rate planet, he's been to Coruscant."

Trevis looked over to the man who saved his life today, "Do you trust his plan?"

Grask hissed and nodded.

"Fine. We'll do as you say. Just make sure we have a quick escape, I don't want to be caught in another fire-fight with a legion of their guards." Trevis and Grask walked away.

Drak stopped them, "Wait, one more thing." He gulped and cleared his throat, "Uh, do you have an extra gun?"

Trevis grinned with a sneaky smile, "Lost yours?"

"Shut up. Do you have one or not?" Drak had handed his weapon off to one of his hired mercenaries, arrogantly brandishing the lightsaber during the hostage situation. Now, he was armed with a blade that didn't help him when being shot at.

Trevis reached down into his boot and pulled out a tiny laser pistol that wasn't very powerful. It was a model often used to get by security sensor nets. He handed it over to Drak.

Drak was glad to have the weapon but embarrassed that it was so pitiful. "Thanks," he muttered.

With that the other two slinked into the shadows of the forest, ever watchful for any Jahalan scouts that might be searching for them. Drak put the saber and gun away and headed toward Ashi's home village. It would take a while to get there on foot, but he was certain that time was on his side.

\*\*\*\*\*

Ashi woke late in the morning and found himself curled up on the forest floor. He was sore all over. The moment his eyes opened his depression returned. His dreams had been of that terrible day, all he could hear was screaming. Then he saw his mother and father, lying on their death beds. It seemed that one horrible memory conjured up another. He had been so young when they died he hardly remembered them. But, he could remember the touch of her hand resting on his chest when he slept in a crib. He could remember his father holding him up on his shoulders to watch the fireworks on Life Day. Yet, the happy memories were tainted by the last sight he ever saw of his parents.

Suddenly Roh appeared before him, "Have you decided, young padawan?"

Ashi put his swords on his back and then strapped his travel bag over them, "I have decided. I'm going to

find Mists Village. It's along this path." He stepped over a log and continued toward the mountains.

Roh disappeared and appeared near him, walking along. "Then your choice is to abandon your journey?"

Ashi looked up, squinting into the mid-morning sunlight breaking through the thick branches. "I haven't decided if I'm going through with these tests or not. I want to, but I'm not sure if I'm truly ready. I failed so often during my training that I fear I'll fail yet again. It seems illogical to go into something that you will fail at."

"If you decide to fail then failure is the only option. "

Ashi stopped and looked at his old master, "How often did I succeed as a padawan? I never built a lightsaber. I never was good enough to join the Clone War. I wasn't good enough to face any of the trials as a padawan. I've lived as a failure my whole life. My only success has been in running away."

Roh gave this some thought before answering, "Your success must be your own choice. I cannot force you to make the right choice, only guide you when you do. The Force has decided it's time for your trials, or I wouldn't be here. Please, don't give up now."

Ashi continued on his way, "I'll take time to think. If I remember correctly, Mists Village is nearer the mountains. I'll get some supplies, perhaps enjoy some time there, and make my choice."

"Meditate and focus yourself. Let the force guide you." Roh vanished away.

Ashi looked up at the tall mountains that were so much closer to him now. He could see the tree line turn into gray stones and white snow. These were tall mountains. At the top of a set of the cliffs was Sorkonia, an ancient castle of his people that was encircled by a town. There were still people living there, and a chief of this province who sat on the ancient throne. The village at the base of these tall mountains was Ashi's destination.

\*\*\*\*\*

Trevis and Grask both stopped at the clearing where Ashi had slept the previous night. Grask walked around sniffing the ground with his serpentine nose.

"Well? Did he stop here?" Trevis asked, keeping a vigilant watch for any scouts or their target.

Grask sniffed more and then looked up in irritation. He waved at his nose and said something in the hissing tongue of the Trandoshans.

Trevis got the clue and asked, "Was it a male?"

Grask nodded as he sniffed again.

"Were there more than one of them here?"

Grask now shook his head and held up a single finger.

Trevis smiled, "Then it's a fair bet that our Jedi spent the night sleeping on this ground. Can you tell me which way he went from here?"

Grask made several passes around the ground until he had a firm location. Once he identified the exit point he continued on, with his nose continuing the scent tracking.

Trevis held up his blaster and followed the green man.



# Brain Benders

## ACROSS

1. \*Meta-human that emerged when the mechanic and the professor became conjoined, with 43A: Var.
5. \*Mechanic (former 4.0 high school student and football star whose knee injury took away any hope of a college scholarship), familiarly
8. \*Professor (former secret member of Team Flash)
13. The "U" in I.C.U.
14. Grimm villain
16. Cognizant
17. City near Phoenix
18. \_\_\_-Pei (dog)
19. Derby prize
20. Bard's "before"
21. \*Ancient Egyptian high priestess who was killed and reincarnated 206 times
23. Id \_\_\_
24. Rein, e.g.
26. "Wheel of Fortune" buy
28. Payable
30. Toward the stern
32. Belt from a flask
36. Prefix with stat
39. Distribute, with "out"
41. Certain skirt
42. The lot
43. \*See 1A
45. Pay-\_\_\_-view

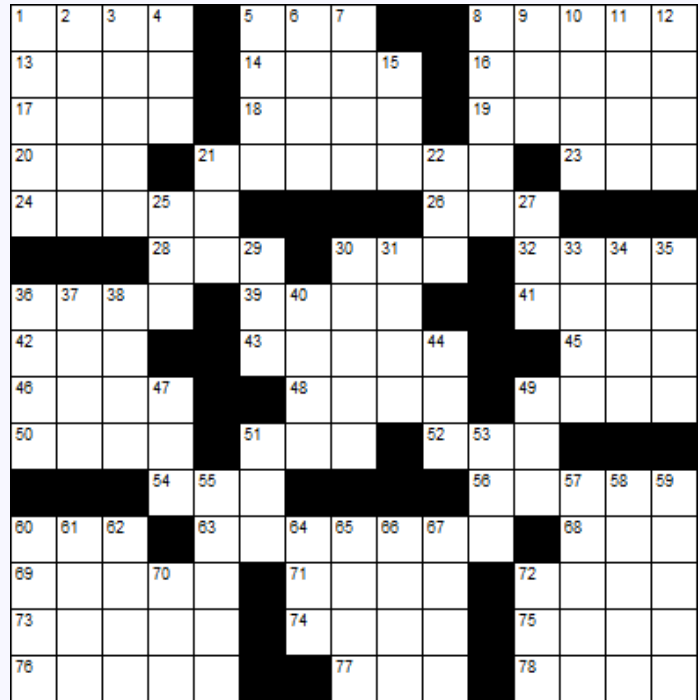
46. Building partition
48. Paquin of "True Blood"
49. Ardor
50. Wounded \_\_\_, South Dakota
51. Ginger \_\_\_
52. Forensic science tool
54. Bat wood
56. Surprise at the polls
60. "Stupid me!"
63. \*Legends persona of 76A, with 78A
68. Musician's asset
69. Acid in proteins
71. Whiskey \_\_\_
72. Scottish Gaelic
73. Louisiana marsh
74. Look \_\_\_ (study)
75. 20-20, e.g.
76. \*World class thief from Central City
77. Seemingly forever
78. \*See 63A



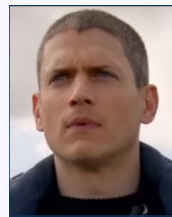
## DOWN

1. Noxious emissions
2. Dead to the world
3. Stage item
4. Airport posting: Abbr.
5. Rib
6. Turkish title
7. MRI predecessor
8. Kitchen wrap
9. Cube root of
10. Leisure
11. Furies
12. Hatchling's home
15. Geologic time period
21. PC "brain"
22. Fink
25. Bother
27. Suffix with hero
29. Dash lengths
30. In agreement (with)
31. Common house plant
33. Erase completely, as memory
34. Brain flash
35. \*See 36D
36. \*Legends persona of 21A, with 35D: Var.
37. Dash
38. Monte Carlo miss: Abbr.
40. And others: Abbr.
44. Bonkers
47. Grazing area
49. Nuke
51. "I knew it!"
53. Convent dweller
55. One doing recon
57. Prefix for mechanism or motor
58. Artist's stand
59. Prevailing tendencies
60. Applies lightly
61. Neighbor of Yemen
62. Slangy hello
64. Chi follower
65. Dial sound
66. Prefix with pilot
67. Press, as clothes
70. Swe. neighbor
72. Common Market inits.

## ESB Crockett's Spirited Crossword Puzzle \*21st Cen. Superheroes and Supervillains Destined to become... Legends - Part 2 by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa - August 2017



## Answers to Previous Puzzle



# More Brain Benders

## SUDOKU PUZZLE

August 2017

Hard Symmetrical

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to July's Sudoku Puzzle  
Medium Symmetrical

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

## WORD SEARCH

August's Topic: Victor Garber Roles

Look for 30 character names

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to July's Word Search:  
Neil McDonough Roles

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	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

# Brain Benders

## Word Search

### August's Word List:

Admiral Halsey	Jerry
Arnold	Jesus
Arthur	John White
Cal	Mark
Dan	Paul
Digby	Philip
Dr. Martin Stein	Sid Luft
Eric	Sol Salinger
Ferguson	Taylor
Fluffy	Tim
Greg	Tis Brooke
Harold	Valere
Hemingway	Warren
Isaac	Wilf
Jackson Beaudine	Willy



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