



# Crockett's Spirit

*Impavidus Scribere Veritas — The Brave Write the Truth*



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## Fiction

### The Alfore Encounter - 50

**"Predictions, Predictions..."**

by CAPT Two Wolves

Upon entering Malili's tent, Skonn and Janice discovered her assistant clearing away the remnants of the noonday meal.

"We'll come back another time," Janice apologized as she started backing away, pulling Skonn with her.

"Absolutely not! I've finished my meal. Even if I were still eating, I would've spoken to you. I have some very important things to tell you," Malili stated, stopping the couple in their tracks.

Malili watched the silent communication between the two and smiled. Something had dramatically changed between the starship captain and her first officer. Invited to sit, they both sat cross legged on the cushions provided close to one another with relaxed and intimate familiarity.

"Oh, hello little one. I haven't seen one of your kind in decades," Malili said having espied Ehco's little face peering over the edge of Skonn's hood. "Would you like a treat?" she asked.

Ehco, having looked back at Skonn for approval, which he gave, scampered down his right arm to grab a crunchy from Malili's palm. Then, like a shot, she ran back up Skonn's arm and retreated into his hood to devour her treat in privacy.

"At the risk of sounding cliché, I have good news and I have bad news," Malili started. "Which do you want to hear first?" she asked.

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## Fiction

### Vanthea: Tyranny's Dawn

**Book 2 - RANIB**

by LTJG Star Eagle

**Four years ago...**

RANIB SLOWLY WOKE from a slumber that had lasted so many days and months that he'd forgotten he was dreaming. He gathered in his surroundings—a large tent made of tan linen, sparsely furnished with a bed, a few large cushions, and a stand with a wash basin. He was clothed in a long night-shirt made of white linen with red trim.

He was utterly confused. This was not, after all, the palace in which he'd been living. His wife was nowhere to be seen, and he could not hear the voices of either his two sons or his two daughters. Not even a single servant was in attendance.

He removed his sheets and rose from the bed. Slowly and cautiously he moved about the tent, eventually raising the flap to peer out the entrance. A large, walled city confronted his gaze from nearly two miles away. Closer to him were more tents like his own. To his right, a little farther away than the city, seemed to be an oasis. He had never been here before. He had absolutely no idea of where he was or why he was here.

Ranib noticed a few men and women outside his tent. He recognized none of them but one, a man conversing with two other men, all of them standing about thirty feet from him. He distinctly heard the name "Marjal," and he deduced that they were just outside the famed "City of Thieves."

Mid-conversation, the man noticed Ranib and waved to him, calling his name. Ranib quickly withdrew into his tent. He knew that he knew *that* man, but he couldn't remember his name or how they knew one another.

He returned to his bed. Within seconds, the other man entered and then held his place. The man looked hard into his eyes.

"Ranib! Is it really you?" asked the man.

Something then occurred to Ranib that he hadn't noticed in all his confusion. No matter where he'd

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The Nicola Tesla's captain, Brigadier General Darden's daughter, took a deep breath and decided.

"The bad news first."

"I see death and destruction," Malili said. Janice felt like she was just gut punched but didn't show it. "Not any of your crew, but, your ship will be affected," Malili continued. Both Human and Vulcan stared wordlessly at the prophetess.

"The good news? You will have a son," Malili added in contrast.

"But, but, the doctors said I could never conceive again," Janice blurted out.

"That's because the doctors," Malili started, raising her fingers and making quotation mark gestures, "don't know The One and True who made you. If He says you will have a son, you will have a son."

Janice suddenly felt weak all over and would've fallen if Skonn's strong arm hadn't supported her. Malili called for her assistant who hurried in with a pitcher of cool water and two glasses. She poured a glass and handed it to Skonn, who held it for Janice to sip.

"Are you alright?" Skonn asked after Janice had finished the water.

"I'm fine," Janice replied. "I think I need to step outside for some fresh air. Was that all?" she asked the prophetess as she rose to leave.

"I have just one favor to ask of you. Once your son is born, please bring him back to see me that I may bless him," Malili requested.

"We will," Skonn answered, speaking up for a dazed and tongue-tied Janice as they exited the tent.

"I need a drink, Skonn," Janice declared as she hurried away from Malili's tent.

"You just consumed 500ml of water. Do you require more?" Skonn asked as he turned towards a soft drink stand.

"No. I'd like some Vodka," Janice told countered.

Skonn stared at her with widened eyes, "Janice, you cannot. You will be too inebriated to attend the reception," He chided.

"Oh, yes, that's right. I'll wait to imbibe at the reception," Janice said with a mischievous grin.

"As a rule, the official hosts do not serve hard intoxicants as the athletes must compete the next day. The majority of the drinks will be what Terrans call 'spiked punch'," Skonn intoned seriously, so seriously that Janice had to laugh.

"I see you don't know how to take a joke yet, my husband," Janice quipped.

"Indeed. I must be on the alert henceforth," Skonn replied.

"What I really want is something to eat. I'm not going to make it until this evening without eating," Janice asserted, envisioning herself pigging out on finger foods.

"What type of fare do you seek?"

"Burnt meat on a stick," Janice said as she made a beeline towards a kabob shop.

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roamed in his palace or his lands, no matter how hard he'd tried to ignore them, he'd always felt the presence of his watchers. He knew that they always kept an eye on him, always listening and waiting for him to fight them, except whenever he fell asleep and was having even deeper dreams. Only there could they not spy on him. Now, however, they were gone—all except for one spirit: the dark one.

Ranib then remembered how he'd resisted them in the beginning. After the slaughter at Sukhar-Halesh, he'd tried to take back his body and shut them out. They simply had too much power, though. Time after time they would punish his resistance with the visions of what they had done to those people...to those children...things that they had made *him* do. Defeated and nearly driven mad as the days and weeks passed, Ranib began to create his own world. He had actually made a good life for himself. He was a just prince over his people, and he and his family could not want for anything. As he was safe and content, so were his people. It was nearly a perfect world. Aside from the watchers occasionally making themselves known, he had forgotten about the real world, and he'd forgotten his friends.

Now he remembered. "Jibral," he said, and he began to weep.

Jibral rushed to his friend. He embraced the tormented man and held him. At first Ranib tried to resist, but he quickly gave up.

Jibral took Ranib's head into his hands so they had to look at one another. "They are giving you a period of rest," he started. "Your body has been deteriorating. You need to be yourself again. At least, that is what they told me to tell you," he explained.

"What have I done?" whispered Ranib, his eyes wide open, tears still pouring.

"It is not your fault, my friend," comforted Jibral.

"I gave them control," answered Ranib.

"But you had no idea that they would be so evil," Jibral assured.

"Then I have been twice the fool," Ranib said. After all, he reasoned, he was a fool for letting them take over his body as well as believing the lies they used to convince him to do it.

He put his hands over Jibral's. "You have to kill me," he uttered. "You need to do it now, while I am still me!"

Jibral's look of concern turned into disbelief. "No—that is your guilt speaking, not you! You have endured too much to give up now!" he argued.

Ranib stopped weeping, and he actually smiled. It was the expression of a man who had accepted an inevitable truth. "We both know that they will never stop unless they have no way to continue," was his answer.

"I know that, Ranib," Jibral replied. "Perhaps there is another way. We could find some magick spell that could drive them out. I have heard of priests exorcising demons and evil spirits from the possessed. There

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must be something,” he counseled. “We just need time.”

“They would return before we could do any of that,” Ranib countered. “What you must do, you must do quickly.”

Jibral moved aside to let Ranib rise from the bed. The two both knew that he wanted to die on his feet, with some amount of dignity.

“How do you want me to do it?” asked Jibral.

Ranib responded with a question: “Do you have a dagger?”

His friend nodded, pulling out a simple double-edged blade. Its handle was black, and its steel had lost its sheen long ago. Jibral was good about keeping it sharp, however.

Ranib ripped the front of his nightshirt open, giving Jibral unfettered access to his heart. He closed his eyes.

Jibral sighed. “You are a good man, Ranib. I will pray for your happiness in the land of the dead,” he spoke softly.

Jibral raised his hand to strike. As he did so, Ranib opened his eyes. They were no longer his friend's eyes, however. In an instant, they had turned back into the black irises and white pupils of the Foreseer. The dark spirit, the only one with Ranib at the moment, was now in control.

Jibral froze; the transformation had startled him. The dark spirit grabbed his right arm and held it above him. In the next second, it took the palm of its hand and struck Jibral in the nose with such great force that it jammed cartilage and bone into his brain and knocked him back. The dark spirit released its grasp. Jibral collapsed upon the floor, bleeding profusely and twitching as his brain shut down from the massive trauma it had just received. Within seconds, he was dead.

“Look what you have made me do,” the dark spirit said to Ranib, who had been watching in horror.

The dark spirit called outside for guards. Before long, two came in. “Dispose of this,” it told them, and they quickly obeyed.

“Unfortunately, I must still release you so that your body may heal,” it said to Ranib. Within seconds, Ranib was himself again. He knelt down by the bloodstains where Jibral had died, and once more he wept.

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Evor L'rahk had been waiting for this day, for this opportunity, for the last six months. Yesterday, the Foreseer told him that he would be its temporary host today. Ranib's body was deteriorating from the effects of its control over him for this long. To rest and recover, he needed time to be alone. The Foreseer, however, had to find a new host. It had asked Evor, and he had instantly consented.

He had followed the Foreseer's instructions perfectly, readying everything the night before for the ritual. At dawn, he'd slit his wrists, bringing him to the point of death. Then the Foreseer had entered him.

During the transference, Evor had learned the truth about his master: they were several spirits that had amalgamated into one. While they had distinct personalities, they acted with one will. For all intents and purposes, they had become one being. They had left one spirit behind with Ranib, however, to act as a portal to let them all back in when the time was right.

When he'd agreed to let it in, he'd actually struck his own bargain with it. He'd asked that he could remain in control, a willing supplicant to carry out its will. At first it had not liked this idea, but then it had searched Evor's mind, and in so doing discovered that his lust for power was very much akin to its own. Realizing this, it had finally given permission.

Evor knew what to do. He stood facing the east, less than a mile from the Oasis of the Children of the Living World, a pagan temple dedicated to the element of earth. Several adherents to the True Faith were behind him, waiting for his command. He turned to look upon his children, and they gazed in wonder; his eyes had turned into the eyes of the Foreseer. With his staff of power and his white priestly attire, he was a figure both magnificent and terrifying to behold.

“My children,” he called to them, “we march for the Faith. We shall raze this unholy site to the ground, and we shall smite every unbeliever within.”

They all began to walk, chanting the Four Truths and carrying various weapons. A few had armor while most wore simple peasant garb. It didn't matter to them, for they were the stronger. Their god was the One True God. Of course, they would be the victors.

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Luda had been dreading this day for the last six months, ever since her premonitions had turned to darkness. She still trusted her dreams, however, especially when they gave her *deja vu*, as they had lately. The premonition of today was no different. She knew that the dreams were her blessing from the world-soul, so this had to be done. The dreams only revealed themselves when she needed them to keep her on the right path. That path would, this very day, lead her where she did not want to go. That being said, she would continue to obey the world-soul and do what she'd been shown.

She was a rather small woman of 5'2", covered in a dark brown wrap that covered her neck down to her ankles. She had not cut her jet black hair in years, and she hung it in several tied sections down to her calves. Her skin was almost as dark as her wrap, making her appear from a distance like she was either totally naked or fully clothed. Her brown eyes were even darker than her skin.

A younger woman, undeniably her daughter, stood with her. Wynola was a bit taller than her mother, and her jet black hair only came down to her shoulder blades, but her skin, eyes and facial features bore a striking family resemblance. Where her mother wore a ceremonial wrap, she clad herself in leather armor.

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She held a long spear in her left hand while her mother held a staff of beech-wood, topped with a shard of obsidian.

They both examined the Oasis. Luda had always been amazed at the power of the ancient magicks that kept this place lush and green, even though no typical springs of water were present. A simple well lay inside their dwelling, taking care of their needs. Then, they looked out to the west, beyond the oasis and the sandstone altar with the imbued diamond in its center. They gazed to the small dust cloud headed their way, to the group of people marching to destroy them, lead by their highpriest.

Luda then looked to the four members of the Oasis that stood before her, also looking to the west. Joresahl was a tall, slender young human man with long black hair pulled into a ponytail that rested high atop the back of his head. Yuna was a middle-aged eldrin woman with long red hair. Weyshune stood just over four feet tall, being a dorven man in his prime. His bald head sported a tattoo of flames. Norla, a venerable woman with graying hair streaked with black, appeared human even though she was feyn. Each one of them stood at his or her cardinal point some twenty feet from the altar.

"Daughter," Luda whispered, "you must leave now."

"I will *not*," she answered curtly, turning to stare at her mother.

"If you wish to live, you will do as I say, child."

Wynola took her mother by the arm, forcing Luda to face her daughter. "You expect me to leave you in the moment of your greatest need?" she asked, the anger rising through her whispering. "How do you expect to save the Oasis without me?"

Luda stared back. "The Oasis cannot be saved. My dreams have shown me this. You must trust me!" she finally demanded.

Wynola let go. "You can't mean that," she said, lowering her gaze and shaking her head.

Luda then told a half-truth. "We will not survive this, but you must. I need you to flee to the east, to the Obsidian Empire," she explained. "Find the Grove of the Living World, in the dominion of Elriyan. Tell them that the West has fallen. Tell Matron Elzivreth that we have fallen. You must warn them in time; everything depends upon it!" She wanted more than anything to tell Wynola that her mother, and only she, would survive this day. She wanted to tell her daughter to leave so that she would not have to see her mother betray and destroy the Oasis for the eventual good of all. She wanted to, but she simply could not.

"Matron Elzivreth?" asked Wynola.

"Yes," Luda responded, "She and the Patron Jaen are the leaders of the Grove and the keepers of the sacred library. They will know what to do with what you tell them."

Wynola began to protest, but her mother stopped her. "If you have ever loved and trusted me, then do this now! Flee, and may Vanthea be with you!" she

said, pushing her daughter away.

"I promise you, Mother: I shall return," Wynola stated, the anger rising within her. She then headed east, running as fast as that anger could take her.

Staff in hand, Luda then walked to the front of the Oasis. The group of marchers had just stopped before reaching the sacred space, but Evor L'rahk kept walking.

"You are all unbelievers," he began, planting his staff on the ground. "You shall be purged from the land, and your false doctrines shall be purged with you," he warned.

"My lord," answered Luda, "there is no need for such measures."

Luda, the Matron of the Oasis, then turned around to face her four colleagues. She struck her staff into the ground, and she began to chant a spell. Her tears welled up as the spell grew in strength, as the obsidian began to glow brightly. She then aimed the staff directly at the diamond atop the altar. Red lightning shot from her staff, its bolt striking the diamond, which turned gray. The diamond then shot four red bolts directly at each one of Luda's friends and colleagues.

They were simply too shocked to react. They each stared at their Matron in horror as they realized that they were dying, the Oasis was desecrated, and that she had betrayed them all. Their yells and screams echoed as they fell to the ground, one by one.

The diamond in the altar cracked, and then it shattered. The altar splintered apart, and the ancient magicks protecting the Oasis disappeared forever.

Luda dried her tears. She turned around to face the highpriest. "I am at your service, my lords," she said softly, kneeling and placing her staff upon the ground. She bowed her head.

L'rahk looked almost as stunned as the people that Luda had just dispatched. He, and the spirits within, had not anticipated a move such as this. The fact that she knew that they were a collective, the highpriest as their vessel, also unsettled them.

"Why have you killed your own people?" he demanded.

She kept her head bowed. "Because if they knew that I wanted to help you, my Lords, they would've tried to stop me. They were simply in the way," she answered. She couldn't get their expressions of horror out of her mind. She barely managed to keep her wits.

The highpriest scoffed. "If you betray your own people, how trustworthy can you be?" he asked. "What makes you think that I even need you?"

She raised her head, staring directly at the true abomination before her. "Because you desire power. And I know how you can gain power beyond your reckoning," she spoke, louder this time.

Evor L'rahk opened his mouth to tell this woman that he didn't need her, but at that moment the others took over, coalescing into one. "I am already powerful," it began, "so how could you gain me even more power?"

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"If you let me live, I can show you tomorrow. That is when you will attack the city, correct?" she inquired.

"Yes," it answered.

"And if you let me live, I shall gift you with enough bounty to secure your own army," she said.

It blinked. Money equaled power, in its own way.

Luda rose, picking up her staff. "Please follow, my Lord," she beckoned, careful to address the Foreseer in the singular this time. She led it to a small stone building that had been behind them. She took it down its stairs and to a locked door, where she used her staff to dispel the magick keeping it locked.

The Foreseer frowned upon entering the chamber. Inside were gems of all types, sizes and value. Even more important, however, were the chests and burlap bags full of seeds and acorns from plants and trees gleaned from around the world.

"You have brought me down here for seeds?" it asked, obviously offended at what the Matron had to offer. "How am I to secure an army with this?"

"My Lord, these seeds are worth more than gold. The gems can help pay for supplies and for soldiers. The seeds can also be sold, but you can also raise crops to feed that army, as well as your followers," Luda tried her best to explain. "So, you really can secure an army with all of this."

It consulted L'rahk's knowledge and memories to see if, indeed, this woman was speaking the truth. In fact, it deduced, she was.

It grabbed Luda, surprising her and forcing her to her knees. "You must swear fealty unto Ahn'un, and you must vow to carry out His laws," it told her.

"Of course, my Lord," she hastily promised.

It let her go. "And we will be watching you," it warned her.

"So be it," she answered. "I shall prove myself a true and worthy servant."

The Foreseer was about to speak when they both heard the dashing of light steps coming down the stairwell. Soon a young man appeared, thin and tall with dark skin. He bore the dress of a man who'd had to cross a great distance in a short period of time. He recovered his breath as he approached the Foreseer and then bowed.

"I beg pardon, my Lord," he finally said.

"What is it?" asked the Foreseer.

"I bring news from Sukhar-Halesh," the young man began. "The priest that you put in charge begs you to return. Many are beginning to turn away from the Faith," he finished.

Luda took a step forward. "If I may, my Lord?" she asked L'rahk, addressing it in the singular this time to keep their secret. It stared at her for a moment, contemplating her action, and then it nodded once at her.

"Why are they turning away?" she asked the messenger.

He rose slowly and turned to her. "Many that wish to keep the Faith are still struggling to survive. When the ruling council fell, the city descended into chaos. The priest kept the faithful in line for a time, but the

grain houses are still locked up. Many people are starving, without food or shelter, my lady. They do not steal food or clothes, since they do not wish to possibly offend Ahn'un. His priest asks the presence of the Foreseer so that he can tell them what they should do."

Luda reached out her hand and put it on the young man's shoulder. "You are most fortunate, for the Foreseer was giving me instructions to give to the people here--" she darted her eyes to L'rahk for approval, taking his silence as a sign to continue, "--and so I believe that Sukhar-Halesh may benefit from this as well. Return to the priest, and tell him that the will of Ahn'un is to love and take care of His children."

Evor L'rahk decided to assert his will at this point, bringing his own consciousness back to the fore. His eyes widened a bit in surprise over this stunning idea—but he kept silent over the growing protests of the spirits within him.

Luda continued. "Have him tell the people that hoarding is a sin, deplorable in Ahn'un's sight. Take the grain, turn it into bread, and give it to all the people. Feed and clothe and house one another. In doing this, you strengthen one another and thus strengthen the Faith," she finished, a single bead of sweat appearing and then running down her temple and cheek.

"And those who hoard the grain?" asked the messenger.

"Give them one more chance to repent and turn towards Ahn'un," she responded, "and let them know that they shall be loved and taken care of. If they still refuse, then they are our enemies. Kill them and take what they have hoarded."

The messenger looked at the Foreseer one last time, seeking any kind of response.

After a moment, L'rahk spoke. "Yes, it is as my servant says. Go now, and report all that we have said to you."

The messenger departed, leaving Luda to endure what seemed like an eternity of silence with Evor L'rahk—and the Foreseer. He slowly moved in front of her and then turned to face her, his stare constant. She met his gaze, unflinching but feeling so nauseous that she might actually vomit from her nervousness.

Finally, he gave her a sardonic smile. "You are interesting," he began. "Yes, you have piqued their curiosity. It is the only reason you are still alive." He quickly brought up his hand to clench her face in it. Startled, she could not help as her eyes widened.

The highpriest's eyes once more turned color as the Foreseer took over. "Never speak for me again!" it warned her, finally releasing her face. She looked at him in horror one final second before lowering her gaze. "Yes, my lord," was all she managed to say.

"But what you say may have merit," it continued, its tone and demeanor changing to contemplation. "I might ask you your advice from time to time...on the morrow."

Luda looked back up to the Foreseer, and then she bowed her head. "Of course, Foreseer; I am now and always at your service."

She had made her way in.

# Fiction

## Star Wars - Ashi's Shame

### Chapter 15: Eyes in the darkness

by LT Ashinaga

Once he left the bathhouse, Ashi ran as hard as he could through the village toward the path. All the way he kept a keen watch on everyone in case he could catch these men before they got to the city.

He found the path up the mountain and kept running. The path itself was wide and long, it zig-zagged up the side of the steep mountain for a long distance. Not many people climbed this path each day, it was arduous at best. This made it easier for Ashi to spot anyone ahead of him.

After a few levels upward, Ashi slowed down. The air grew thinner and cooler as he ascended. He couldn't see anyone on the path from where he walked. This worried him, they could already be inside the city. At the same time, he tried to convince himself that he was ahead of them and would be waiting when they got there.

As he got higher he looked out and found himself smiling. The forest was a green carpet below him, spreading far across gently rolling hills. He could see down a long stretch of mountains that were even taller than this one. Below him the steams of Mists Village billowed up through the trees, the waters of the pools and ponds near the bathhouses glinted with noon sunlight and reflected the lazy clouds that rolled by.

Beyond the forest and rolling hills he saw the green world turn to the calming brown of grain fields and pastures. He always loved the sprawling plains of home, they felt comfortable. Even in his state of worry right now, the sight of his homelands softened his heart.

"Hey! Let go!" The loud voice of a woman caught Ashi's attention. Someone was in trouble above him on the path.

Ashi picked up his pace again and rounded another curve on the winding path. He saw both mercenaries going after a woman with two children. Before they could see him he flattened himself up against the rock wall out of their sight. He would ascend this wall and slide down to get the drop on them. Step by step he made his way toward the sounds of struggling.

He peered around a small outcropping of rock and snarled at the sight. Each man had a grip on a child, fighting to subdue them. They neither had their weapons drawn. The mother of these children was not letting them go without a fight. She had her claws out and her fangs ready, she scratched and fought, but to no avail.

Ashi watched this confrontation and knew it was the opportunity he needed. She wasn't going to stop them, but she was a good distraction. He took a couple quiet steps out and put his hands on the hilts of his swords. Then he saw the Twi-lek plant a boot in the woman's gut and shove her over the ledge.

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Trevis, having just dealt with the obnoxious woman, grabbed the screaming girl by the neck and held her up with both hands. "One more scratch or scream out of you and I'll throw you over as well."

The girl, crying hard now, finally stopped struggling. Her little brother had stopped already and was bawling at the sight of his mother's death.

Grask and Trevis got their hostages over a shoulder and pulled out their respective weapons. Trevis had a nasty set of claw marks down his arm that were bleeding profusely, but he paid no attention to the pain. Grask waited a moment before following Trevis, he looked toward where the woman fell. He seemed a little distraught.

"Move it!" Trevis barked.

Grask hurried to follow.

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Ashi stood firmly behind where they had been. They were too focused on their plan to notice him standing there. With both hands out and a harsh grimace on his face, Ashi took forced steps toward the cliff. As he approached he lifted his arms slowly and grunted now and then. Finally, he lifted the woman in the air and back onto the road. He had caught her with the force in a reaction he didn't even realize he was capable of. Once she was on the ground he let go of the force and caught his breath.

She trembled and was short of breath. Timidly placing her hands on the ground she pushed herself up and looked at the man holding his knees. "Did you do that?"

He nodded and let out a few breaths to calm his nerves. "Yes...I did. It wasn't easy, trust me."

She got to her feet and looked around. "How?"

"I'm a Jedi Padawan. I caught you with the force."

"You're a Jedi!" She exclaimed. "Then you have to go save my children. They took them!"

Ashi took her hand and held it. "Calm down, please. You must not alert them. I can't just go running after them, they have weapons and I won't be fast enough to stop them from shooting your kids."

A dire panic was growing in her. "We have to save them!"

"I will. Is there another way into the city? A secret passage?"

"I don't know. I haven't been here before. We are supposed to be meeting an old friend of my father's today." She began to blubber. "They're going to kill my children."

"No, they won't. I promise to do everything I can to stop them. Come on." He took her hand and then got up against the wall of rock again to walk with more stealth.

They snaked their way along the wall following the path. Although she was in a state of hysteria, Ashi was certain that they wouldn't kill the kids right away. They were bargaining chips to attract him. However, he had to be clever or they might react without thinking. He would never allow children to die while he stood by. Never again. He would atone for his sin, even if it took his entire life.

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Ashi was on the final stretch of the path leading toward the main entrance to the city. Behind him was the woman doing her best to control her panic, though she was losing that fight.

In his mind, Ashi kept thinking about what Roh had said. He needed the element of surprise on his side or this wouldn't turn out so well. If he just walked in the front entrance, they would see him coming and it would be a standoff.

As he walked, his left hand brushed up against the stone wall of the mountain. He stopped walking and felt something odd against the rocks. The force was especially strong right here.

"Why are you stopping?" The woman asked.

He looked at the wall of rock and felt it. They were just below the city, its wall looming high above them. "I sense something here. This isn't just a rock wall, it's a doorway."

"I don't see a doorway."

Ashi pressed the rocks again and again until he was certain. "Yes. This is an ancient door. It hasn't been used in eons, but I'm sure..." he closed his eyes and used the force to feel all of the door. "I'm sure that I can..." with a downward push of his hands, the rock wall slid back a few inches and then crept downward into a slot cut in the stone below. A door the size of five men now opened, hidden by its natural appearance.

The woman gasped and looked into the dark cave. "What is it?"

Ashi took a cautious step inside. "I've seen this before. In my vision," he said quietly.

"What?"

He spoke louder, "It's a passageway." He sniffed the air. "By the staleness of this air, it hasn't been used in a long time. Wow, this is probably one of the ancient passages used by the first kings of Sorkonia. This city predates the Republic going back into the old republic long ago."

"Fascinating, really. But, I only care about the safety of my children."

Ashi walked in. "I know. If I'm correct, this will lead us to an ancient doorway into the city, one that won't be watched. This should give me the surprise I need to get to them before they hurt anyone." He pulled a small palm-light out of his bag and held it up.

They walked into the passage and found it was a steep incline that led toward the city. Ashi watched for a door of some kind, like what he had seen in his vision.

Suddenly he stopped and lowered his light. "Do you see that?"

She frowned and looked around, "No. I don't see anything. Without your light, this place is very dark."

Master Roh's voice came from around him, "Trust your senses. Look not only with your eyes but with the force."

Ashi took the woman's hand and held it. "Keep calm, I have to turn off this light now."

"What?" Her tone was broken and scared.

"Trust me." He flicked the light off and the cave became very dark to her. But, to him, he saw a strange blue glow on the surface of the walls.

He followed the light until he found a tiny crack in the wall where a bright blue light was glinting. He put his hand on it and shoved. He didn't even need to use the force here, the wall crumbled and fell apart, revealing a small alcove with two brightly glowing blue lights. He whispered, "The eyes in the dark."

"Can you see something?" she called out.

Ashi asked, "Can you not see them? Two blue stones glowing brightly."

"I don't see any stones."

Ashi turned the palm light back on and handed it to her. "Please, hold this. I'm going to get something and then we will find our way out of here." He stepped through the small opening in the wall and picked up two blue stones, which to him were glowing. They weren't kyber crystals, they were snowflake sapphires, a rare gem found only in these mountains on this planet. The force has imbued into these two great power and strength, giving them the ability to be made into lightsaber cores. After all these years, he has finally been presented with the crystals for his own lightsabers.

After putting the sapphires securely away, he joined her again and they continued on the ancient path. It became terribly steep toward the end, but the sounds of the city were now all around them. They might not have been aware of the city being so close, but the screaming of frightened people caught their attention quickly.

"There, a door!" she called out pointing the light toward the end of the tunnel.

Sure enough, there was a metal door with strange writing pressed into the iron. Words were inscribed on it in the ancient language of the Jahalan people.

Ashi ran up to it and pushed on it, it didn't budge. He shoved harder, but nothing happened. "Well, that didn't work like my dream showed."

"What?"

"Nothing." He felt all over the door and tried to figure out how it worked. "It looks like this door hasn't been opened in many years." He picked up a stone and hit the door, checking the sound it made. "Just as I figured. They built over this door. There's probably a stone wall on the other side of it. But, it won't be too thick. Probably just a facade."

"What does that mean? How can we get through it?"

Ashi held up his hands and focused his mind on the force. This cave was especially strong in the force and that would aid him right now. The door jostled and groaned, the sound of stone cracking could be heard on the other side. He was breaking through. Suddenly, enough of the stone slipped off the exterior surface that voices became clearer. He stopped and quickly placed his ear on the door.

"Don't stop!" she called out.

He held up a hand as he pressed one ear up to the door. "Wait. I hear something."

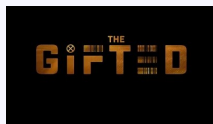
# Brain Benders

## ACROSS

1. \*Former prosecutor of mutants on the run, with 52A
5. \*Human nurse skilled in mutant medicine who is the wife of 1A, with 52A
9. \*Ruthless agent of 29A bent on bringing down the Mutant Underground, with 54A
13. Packing heat
15. "Pumping \_\_\_\_"
16. "Zounds!"
17. Pick off from a distance
18. Partner of rave
19. H.S. math
20. Risks
22. Minstrel poet
24. 22A's "before"
25. It's dipped in a dip
27. \*Mutant daughter of 1A and 5A who can put up protective barriers, with 52A
29. \*Government agcy. ostensibly set up to protect the nation from mutant threats, with 75A
33. Mont Blanc, e.g.
34. In addition
35. Rams' ma'ams
37. Vaughan of jazz
41. Set, as a price
42. \*Agent of 29A who works alongside 54A
44. Santa \_\_\_\_ (Pacific wind)
45. Chances upon
48. Iroquoian

## DOWN

49. Con
50. Broadcast
52. \*See 1A, 5A, 27A, 73A, 74A
54. \*See 9A
57. Hyperbolic function
58. Criticize harshly
59. J.F.K. postings
61. San Joaquin Valley city
65. Boat in "Jaws"
67. Bad day for Caesar
69. Acquired relative
70. Blaring
71. Season to be jolly
72. Necklace item
73. \*Mutant father of 1A who tried to find a way to suppress the X-Gene, with 52A
74. \*Mutant son of 1A and 5A who has destructive abilities, with 52A
75. \*See 29A



## DOWN

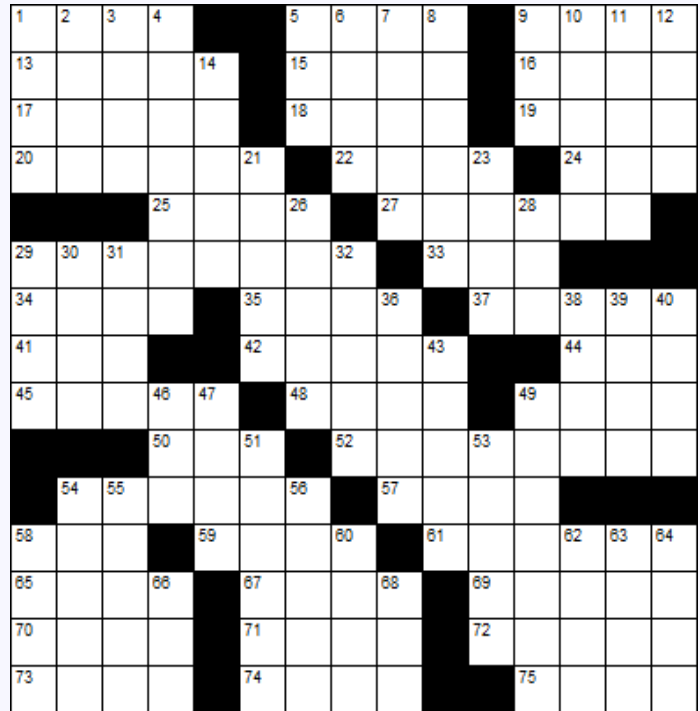
1. Woodworking tool
2. Marine eagle
3. Kuwaiti ruler
4. Portrays
5. White wine aperitif
6. Speedy steed
7. Pitch-like, in music
8. Lure into law-breaking

9. Boeing 777, e.g.
10. Concur
11. Prehistoric burial mound made of stones
12. Outskirts
14. Indian metropolis
21. Strength
23. Membership fees
26. North American flycatcher
28. Messenger \_\_\_\_
29. Unwanted e-mail
30. Otherwise
31. Microwave, slangily
32. Eyes lasciviously
36. "S.N.L." bits
38. Colonel or captain
39. Prefix with chamber or bellum
40. Tresses
43. Printing flourish
46. Black gunk
47. Trig ratio
49. Sunflower seeds, botanically
51. Image receiver for the eye
53. Tear open
54. Diviner's deck
55. Like raw diamonds
56. Hazardous gas
58. Game on horseback
60. Plant-to-be
62. Serb or Croat
63. Drug buster
64. Night fliers
66. "Much \_\_\_\_ About Nothing"
68. Artful

## ESB Crockett's Spirited Crossword Puzzle

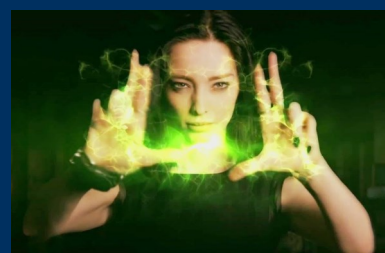
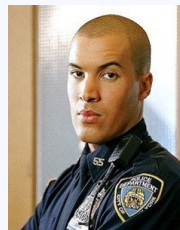
### \*Those with a Genetic Gift - Part 1

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa - November 2017



## Answers to Previous Puzzle

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





# More Brain Benders

## SUDOKU PUZZLE

November 2017  
 Medium, Non-Symmetrical  
 by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to October's Sudoku Puzzle  
 Easy Non-Symmetrical

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

## WORD SEARCH

November's Topic: Amy Acker Roles  
 Look for 30 character names  
 by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to October's Word Search:  
 Penny Johnson Jerald Roles

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

# Brain Benders

## Word Search

### November's Word List:

Amanda	Melissa
Andrea Barr	Miggy
Beatrice	Molly
Claire	Nancy
Claudia	Nina
Crystal	Nova
Dawn Jones	Penelope
Gina	Root
Helena	Samantha Groves
Illyria	Sophie
Jackie	Tracey
Jodi	Trish Arkin
Kate Strucker	Venus
Lily	Whiskey
Lin	Winifred Burkle



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