



# Crockett's Spirit

*Impavidus Scribere Veritas — The Brave Write the Truth*



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## Fiction

### Star Wars - Ashi's Shame

#### Chapter 17: Lost in Translation

by LT Ashinaga

Ashi and Grask walked through Sorkonia. Ashi hadn't been inside this city since he was a small boy. There were moments that a building or a statue would summon a vague memory. For a brief moment, he recalled the feel of his mother's hand holding his as they walked.

The city itself was ancient, older than any other Jahalan settlement. The streets and some of the oldest buildings were cut right out of the solid rock of the mountain. The newer buildings were constructed of thick stones. The newest building here predated the former Galactic Republic. In fact, the door he destroyed to get out of the tunnel was constructed during the age of the original Jedi temple.

It was cooler here this far up in the mountains; Ashi could use a coat. Most of the people here wore more clothing than the typical Jahalan. Jahalan men often do not wear anything above the waist, since they have so much fur and a thick mane over most of their upper body. But the men here had on specially made vests to help keep them warmer.

They finally approached the ancient palace and found that it was just like the old buildings, cut from the mountain. Unlike the old buildings, which appeared to be somewhat detached from the mountain they were hewn from, this palace was partly uncut, giving it the appearance of melding with the moun-

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## Fiction

### Vanthea: Tyranny's Dawn

#### Book 2 - EVOR L'RAHK - Part 2

by LTJG Star Eagle

Ranib stood atop an elegant balcony from which he could see and hear over half of the city's inhabitants. The balcony itself was part of an ornate bed chamber, complete with silk sheets and trays of the finest foods and wines one could enjoy. He knew not from whom this chamber had been procured, or indeed just how, exactly—but by this point Ranib knew better than to ask.

He gazed upon the ancient trade city this night. No longer were pillars of smoke from the blazes set by the Children; it had been two weeks since Ranib had been freed—mostly—and the battle for the city took place. He also heard singing from two different areas, but he didn't understand the particular dialect. It must have been, he surmised, in their native language, not one of the several that they as a trading people had learned, including his.

He felt a presence behind him, so he turned around. In the doorway stood a woman with long, black hair. He had met this woman a few times since the battle.

"Are you alright, my lord?" was all she asked.

"Yes, I am fine—and please don't call me that. My name is Ranib," he responded. "Your name is Luda, right?"

She smiled. "Yes, Ranib." She drew closer to him and also looked out upon the city. She heard the songs, too.

"Do you know what they're saying?" she asked him after a moment.

"I'm sorry; I don't. I don't understand the native tongue."

"They are singing praises to Ahn'un and His Foreseer," she began. "They praise him that they now have food and sandals and a place to sleep. And they praise the Foreseer for bringing the law of Ahn'un to them, so that they may have all these good things."

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mountain itself. Some of the taller parts of the palace even had snow on them. It was a stark gray building with thick walls, and a dangerous appearance.

Jahalan guards were at full strength, having been summoned to service due to the unexpected threat in the streets. As both Ashi and Grask walked through the gates into the inner courtyard, a dozen eyes kept a stern watch on them.

Inside the palace, they were led down a long, elegant corridor toward the main throne room. Along the smooth stone walls were tall tapestries of fine Jahalan embroidery depicting the long history of Sorkonia. Ashi smiled as his eyes followed his people's history.

They finally entered the throne room and found it uncharacteristically empty. There was a heavy chair where the chief would sit, as well as large windows that looked out over the city. An upper balcony above the throne would hold the various members of the council who would speak on behalf of the people. This was much more regal than the little courthouse in Ashi's home village.

"Wait here," one of the guards instructed and then left to summon the chief.

Ashi leaned a little to the right and waited, not sure what to expect. He heard a strange sound and realized it was a nervous wheeze coming out of Grask. The man was trembling so hard that he was about to pass out. Ashi put a hand on his shoulder. "Don't be so scared. I'm sure the chief is wise."

Grask gave Ashi a look mixed with confusion and fear.

"What do you see?" Roh's voice suddenly asked.

Ashi looked to his other side and found his master standing there. No one else in the room would see Roh, for only those strong in the force could see a spirit within. "What?"

Roh leaned forward slightly and looked at the terrified Trandoshan. "Tell me about your new friend?"

Ashi looked at Grask and then back at Roh. "Friend? He's not my friend."

Grask gave Ashi a funny look now, hearing the man talk to nothing.

Roh smiled at Ashi. "Didn't I teach you better than that? A Jedi does not judge merely by sight, but through deeds, history, and most importantly, the force. Tell me, what do you see?"

Ashi looked back at Grask for a moment. Grask gave him a bewildered look and then said something in Trandoshan. Ashi asked, "Can you understand me?"

Grask nodded and then patted the side of his head with a nod. He then patted his universal translator and shook his head.

Ashi smiled kindly. "I see. Your translator is broken. Well, it's good you still understand me. It would help if you could talk to us, though. I'm afraid the chief here probably doesn't have a protocol droid to help translate." He noticed that Grask's jaw shivered and he looked green, more so than usual. "I would think a mercenary or bounty hunter wouldn't be so scared. Haven't you faced bad situations before?"

Grask quickly shook his head and then said something.

Ashi sighed hard. "I wish I understood what you were saying. Perhaps I can sense more through the force." He closed his eyes and opened his mind to the force.

Roh asked, "Tell me, what do you see?"

Ashi looked back at his mentor and said, "I sense fear and a little anger, but there is not the same darkness I sensed in the others."

"Trust your feelings, padawan, they will serve you well." Then Roh vanished.

Ashi looked at Grask one more time. "I guess you're a little confused. Don't worry. As I said, I'm sure the chief..."

"That would be matron." A strong woman's voice echoed in the room.

Ashi found a lovely middle aged Jahalan woman, in regal attire, walking in with two guards at her side. She stepped up the single level to the throne and sat on it. He bowed his head to her. "You must be the leader of Sorkonia."

"Matron Askos, yes. This is my province and my people." She cocked her head. "And you must be the Jedi I've heard so much about, the one who rescued those two children in the streets."

Ashi bowed his head again. "I did rescue the children, but I'm no Jedi, just a padawan."

"Pardon me." She said, "A padawan, which, if I recall correctly, is still a former member of the Jedi order."

"Yes."

Askos got up and walked toward him, her tail flipping back and forth rather seductively. She circled around him and touched his bare chest. "And here I expected some aged man hiding from the hunters. When I learned it was a Jedi, I never expected to see one of our own."

Ashi could sense that she was interested in him. "I'm unique among our kind."

"True. And I like that in a man." She stopped and brushed her hand on his face.

He gently took her hand off of his face, "I'm afraid that Jedi do not indulge in romantic ventures."

"Pity." Askos walked back to her throne. Ashi couldn't tell if she were serious, or just being playful. Often Jahalan women in power flirt to assert their dominance. "In any case, I'm very curious about two things. First, why did you stop my men from arresting this criminal? His guilt is obvious, his actions horrible."

Ashi could sense the sheer terror now filling Grask, "Matron, I would like to approach this a little more calmly. His accomplice, who was the aggressor, seemed to be in charge. This man saved your people by killing the other. Before you judge him, I suspect it would be wise to listen to him."

She nodded and then waved a hand at Grask. "Speak. Make your case."

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Grask hissed and then gave Ashi a worried look.

Ashi cleared his throat. "I'm afraid he cannot speak for himself. Apparently, his translator has been broken." He looked at Grask. "Can you write in anything other than Trandoshan text?" Grask shook his head. Ashi looked to Askos again. "If you would allow me some time, I might be able to repair his translator. That is unless you have a protocol droid here to help?"

"My protocol droid is currently with the minister of defense heading for Kalk City." She smiled and almost batted her eyes at Ashi. "Try to fix his translator. Be quick, I don't like waiting."

Ashi pushed on Grask's shoulder to turn him around and led him toward another area. He paused and looked back. "What was the other thing? You said there were curious about two things?"

Askos played with the armrest of her chair. "Yes. We received an interesting message only moments before you arrived. It is disconcerting. I hope you can help us find a resolution." She pressed the button and a holographic generator projected Drak into the room.

The recorded message began playing. "I am Drak. I have an automated message ready to send to the Empire. There is a Jedi among you, a man who has evaded me several times now. I want his head. I'll deliver him to the Empire or I'll alert the Empire to his presence and they will come, scour your planet, put your people in chains, and execute all who try to hide him. Either turn him over to me, dead or alive, or I will make your whole planet wish you had. You have three days." The message ended.

Ashi spent a moment pondering that. "I...I don't know what to say."

Askos turned the holo-generator off. "I've sent word to the other chiefs; we're going to decide what to do. I had wished that the Jedi was not one of us, so we could let him and the empire deal with one another. But, you're not an alien, you're Jahalan. It isn't our practice to hand over our own people into what is sure to be an execution. However..."

Ashi anticipated and agreed with what she was about to say. "If the empire comes, they'll kill many more to get to me."

"You see the dilemma we're facing."

Ashi looked at Grask, who seemed desperate to say something. "I'll fix his translator and we can talk. He also worked for that man, he might be able to tell us more about the situation."

"Go then. Don't dawdle."

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Ashi and Grask were put into a small room near the main court-chamber with a pair of guards stationed at the door. Grask felt that the guards were there to watch him, but Askos was concerned that other Jahalans might want to take matters into their own hands regarding Ashi. Threats of Imperial Invasion

always caused a population to make foolish decisions.

The extra security didn't bother Ashi; it was logical. Besides, he trusted Askos, as she seemed honorable. He focused his attention on the small device from Grask's outfit. Grask had removed it and placed it in Ashi's hands. Using a rather crude device, Ashi had opened the back and looked to see what might be wrong with it.

The room itself was a small stone box with three tapestries hanging from the walls. An ancient stone bench sat in front of each tapestry.

Grask was seated on a bench, holding his arms tightly against his chest. Ashi paced around as he worked. He could hear a low muttering from the Trandoshan. At first, he wondered if the man were saying unkind things in his own tongue since no one here could understand him. But, Ashi glanced over and saw that look on his face. He wasn't muttering angrily, he was rehearsing a speech. Ashi doesn't speak Trandoshan, but he can recognize repeated words. The man was working on what he would say once his translator was finally working again. He looked quite frightened. It was pitiful.

Ashi sat down across the room from Grask and pulled components out from the broken device, spreading them across the bench. He decided it would be nice to talk with Grask. Picking up the translator he tapped a button on the side. "Is the receiver still working? Can you understand me?"

Grask looked and gave a short nod.

Ashi smiled. "Good, then those parts aren't damaged at all. Only these. I think I can use some parts from the communicator I picked up from your friend to fix this thing." Ashi pulled out the holo-com device Trevis had been using. "I can probably use the translator chip from this communicator to supplement yours,"

Grask said something, and he didn't look happy saying it. Then he tightened his arms around his middle and seemed to shiver. He wasn't trembling as much now. That had turned into a shivering.

Ashi felt for this man. He was very much alone. A feeling Ashi understood implicitly. So, he did what he always did best, talked. Most of the Jedi masters back at the temple said that Ashi could talk too much, which could be a gift at times. "See that," He pointed to the tapestry on the wall between them, "that's the conquests of the Sorkon tribe during the early ages. They united my people back when we were a scattered group of nomadic tribes. The Sorkon tribe had first developed space flight and knew we were joining a bigger universe. Their leaders understood that we needed to be a unified people. They founded the Sorkonian Empire. We traversed the stars long before the Second Republic."

He then pointed to the tapestry behind Grask. It wasn't a pleasant sight. There were warrior Jahalan's fighting people in strange armor. "We were conquered by the T'kon people and enslaved for five generations.

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The T'kon were defeated by the Jedi of the old Republic and forced to stop their slave trades. We were given our home back. My people had lost their identity and been broken up. It took years for us to come back together as a unified people. No longer did anyone in the universe called us Sorkonians. That had been lost. They referred us according to our planet Jahala's name: Jahalans, which is what we call ourselves today. I'm afraid that the T'kon age left my people afraid to explore, and so we stopped leaving our planet."

Ashi finished putting the components back into the translator. He stood up to show the last tapestry, while he put all the parts back together. "This tapestry symbolizes the new age for my people. The Republic formed again and the galaxy seemed safer. Still, many of my kind were afraid to leave. They didn't trust off-worlders. But, we opened up trade with peaceful systems in the Outer Rim and eventually made contact with the New Republic. My people did not leave our planet, but we did open a few spaceports."

He walked over with the newly repaired device and helped Grask re-attach it to his outfit. While he worked he said, "Do you know why I'm telling you this?"

Grask finally answered, "No."

Ashi smiled, happy his work was successful. "Because my people have suffered and felt very much alone in this big universe. We've lost our name, our home, and our freedom. But, we were given a second chance. All we ever wanted was peace and the right to live as we wanted on our own world. But, people still come, they steal our children and sell them into slavery on distant worlds. They don't pick us because we are particularly important or strong, but because we can't fight back. I can. Honor tells me that I should go with your leader back to the Empire, to save my people. But, my sacrifice will be a short victory as the slavers descend and take my people away from their home."

Grask answered in his tongue and the communicator spoke for him, "I know. I do not want you to go with Drak. He is a mean, evil, greedy man. I'm not a mercenary or bounty hunter. I shouldn't be here, it was a huge mistake."

Ashi sat down next to Grask, a frown on his feline brow. "You're not a mercenary or bounty hunter?"

"No, I'm not."

Ashi sensed that Grask was telling the truth. This man was extremely weak with the force, which made him rather transparent to any Jedi. "Okay, I think you need to tell me your whole story."

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Ranib winced. "You know that there is no real law," he said, "only what *they* want and think at the time."

"What do you think I have been working on these past two weeks?" she asked, turning to face him. He continued to take in the city.

"Good luck to you, dear woman," was all he said.

"We do have the Four Laws," she said.

He rolled his eyes. "But those are--"

"They are only really laws about worshipping Ahn'un," she interrupted. "Yes, I know. But we have a few new laws now. I have taken it upon myself to write down the laws so that all may know them and we may have some sort of consistency," she finished.

"What are these new laws?" he asked, the cynicism in his voice quite clear.

"They are laws on how the Children are to take care of one another. Whoever has more gives more. Make sure that all are fed and clothed and sheltered. Look around you, Ranib—it's working."

Ranib sighed. "Do you really think we will be able to do any good with this situation?" he finally asked.

I think that any religion can do good if good people are working hard to make it so," she answered.

Ranib kept staring toward the city. "I heard that you betrayed and killed your own people," he said.

Luda took a step back. She was not ready for that. After a moment of stunned silence, she spoke softly, "I did what I—what needed to be done so that a greater purpose might be served. There are greater powers than the ones we serve, and they show me what I need to do."

"I truly hope you are right," he offered, "because they won't be happy until their will has spread throughout the world."

"And in doing so, we will have helped thousands upon thousands to make their lives better," was her response.

He finally turned to face her. "But at what cost?"

The deafening silence was finally interrupted by a rapping at the chamber door.

"Yes?" asked Ranib, walking toward the door. Evor L'rahk opened it and stepped into the chamber, followed by three men in turbans and flowing robes. Each one had a differently colored stripe: the oldest had white with purple stripes, the middle-aged man had white with green stripes, and the youngest had white with pink stripes. All were clean-shaven. They also adorned themselves with

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an amulet of bronze containing a piece of willow bark. The physicians were here...again.

They surrounded Ranib and began to look him over. They felt his forehead. The youngest put an ear directly to his heart, while the middle-aged man pulled out a listening cone so he could hear Ranib's lungs. The eldest looked in his eyes and checked his mouth. He also checked Ranib's fingernails.

Though Ranib didn't quite hate this, he found it highly annoying. They had been doing this to him every day for the past ten days.

They all stopped their observations and looked at one another.

"His heart beats strong," spoke the youngest.

"His palor is greatly improved. He has no fever, and his lungs sound clear," said the middle-aged man.

"His eyes and teeth appear healthy," spoke the eldest, "and I can find no trace of scurvy or jaundice."

"I believe he has gained some weight?" asked the youngest. The two others nodded in agreement.

The eldest physician then turned to L'rahk. "We find no evidence of ill health in this man, my lord. We deem him fit for the morrow."

"What is tomorrow?" asked Ranib, though in his heart he already knew: the spirits would take back his body then. He shuddered.

L'rahk stepped through the physicians to get closer to Ranib. "On the morrow, at dawn, the powers of the Foreseer shall be returned to you," he spoke very matter-of-factly. Then he bent in to whisper to Ranib, "They like you better; you are easier to control."

Ranib's heart sank. He wanted to end his life at that moment. He knew—and dreaded—the fact that this was impossible, however.

L'rahk continued to whisper. "They shall show you mercy to keep you well, however. The first day of every month shall be yours alone. They do not wish to leave you again," he finished, backing away from the hapless man.

L'rahk led the physicians out of the chamber. Luda came from the balcony and spoke softly to Ranib, "I mourn the loss of your friend. And I mourn the morrow for you." She put her hand to his face for one instant. Out of earshot from the others, she whispered "And remember that you are dreaming this time. It may yet help us all." Then she turned and left, closing the door behind her.

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Once again Ranib gazed down from his palatial terrace onto his domain of dreams. Though he could not possibly understand the concept of a subconscious mind, it had nonetheless retained every detail of Ranib's world that he had so painstakingly managed to create over the period of a year.

Yes, everything was the same—his palace, his wife and family, even the flowers in the garden and the style of plates on which they ate—except for the fact that Ranib now realized that he was dreaming all of this. He truly felt like a caged god, with so much potential

power in such a confined manner as his peculiar circumstance. Still, he had the power to change what he wanted within his dream-cage, so that did give him some satisfaction. He noticed that the spirits monitoring him were now having a harder time doing so since he'd remembered that he was dreaming. That made him smile.

He looked out as far as his eyes would let him, facing the morning sun and the east. A river gently flowed through the fertile valley, gradually extending to hills and then mountains beyond, all green and full of life and harmony.

Something surprised him this time, however. One of the foothills to the south now appeared to have a cave entrance; one detail had indeed changed. He focused on the entrance, trying to make it out better. Then, realizing he was dreaming, his eyes became super-focused like that of a raptor, as if he could see through spyglasses. Still, the cave entrance yielded nothing but darkness.

"Ranib," whispered a voice.

He couldn't tell whether it was in his mind or whether it came from without. He looked around but no servants were in his chambers, and he knew his family to be having morning tea.

He decided that he'd imagined it, but he couldn't quite let it go. He recognized the voice even with one word: it was Jibral's voice, and this unsettled him slightly.

He returned his attention to the cave. He began to will himself to fly, slowly and awkwardly at first, but as he let go of his fear and found his will, he found it an astoundingly easy task. In fact, he had a newfound sense of ecstasy and freedom as he quickly crossed the span of a few miles to the foothills.

He landed just a few yards in front of the cave entrance. Focusing his eyesight as much as possible, he again peered inside to try to make out any source of light, any detail which might give him a clue as to why this, and only this, was different from before.

He tried in vain. He looked down upon his person and realized he had no weapon to protect himself. He then created a finely-crafted shortsword patterned after one he'd seen back in his thieving days.

He entered the cave. With every step, felt a stronger and stronger urge to uncover the mystery of this place. He kept walking until he could no longer see any light from the entrance. He then created a lit torch which he held in his other hand. To his horror, he could see absolutely nothing except for himself, not even the walls or the floor. He turned around, but he couldn't get his bearings.

"Ranib," called the voice again.

"Jibral—is that you?" he asked the voice.

"Follow my voice," it commanded in a gentle tone.

Ranib turned toward the direction from which the voice had come, and he began to walk again.

"You won't need your torch," spoke the voice, and in the blink of an eye Ranib found himself surrounded

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by a sea of stars and wonders the likes of which he had never seen, in a sky filled with darkly bright iridescent colors.

Ranib fell to his knees. He was terrified. He tried telling himself that this was all part of his dream—that he was in control—but he knew this to be something else entirely.

“Don't be afraid, Ranib,” consoled the voice. “Look ahead of you, and you will see the light.”

As Ranib rose, he was now able to make out what appeared to be light pouring through another cave entrance not far ahead. He slowly walked toward it, and within a minute he was back on what seemed to be solid ground. He heard a rhythmic rushing sound coming from the entrance, but he did not know what it was.

Finally he stepped out of this cave entrance that lay along a ridge. Ahead of him was a beach. He could smell salt, and he saw and heard the waves crashing on some rocks a quarter mile away.

So, this was the ocean.

He looked up to the sky, a pearlescent combination of many colors, brighter than dusk but not by much. His gaze came to rest on a group of palm trees not far away. A man came from the trees and was waving to him. When he recognized the man, he put his sword in the sand.

“Welcome, Ranib.”

“Jibral,” was all he could say as his friend approached him. He instinctively held out his arm. “I am so sorry, Jibral,” he began. “If I could have--”

“Peace, peace,” was Jibral's answer. “It may have been your hand, my friend, but it was not your heart. There is nothing to forgive.” He reached for Ranib and gave him a long hug.

Ranib melted into silent tears. The burden of what he'd done two weeks before could no longer be cast aside, nor could the mercy of his dear friend.

As they ended their embrace, Ranib looked around again. “So this is the land of the dead, eh?” he asked.

Jibral smiled. “A tiny piece of it. My piece. Not unlike what you have done to save your sanity.”

Ranib looked back toward the cave entrance. “And just what was that in there?”

“That would be the bridge between our realms as it truly is,” replied Jibral.

“So how far away are we? From the land of the living?”

“Honestly, I am not sure. It could be vast oceans of emptiness but for the starry hosts, or it could be the walk of a short cave tunnel. It is a marvelous place, and I have just begun to explore it,” Jibral answered.

“And the ocean, Jibral. Was this a place prepared for you?”

“Somewhat. I had the feeling that the place could read my thoughts and innermost desires. I had never been to the sea in my short life, and I always wanted to go. Well, now it has come to me.” He smiled a big toothy grin. “Come, let us walk to the water's edge,”

he finished as the pair began a stroll down to the gentle waves of the beach.

Ranib gazed upon the horizon. Puffy little clouds dotted it along with the rest of the sky in this direction. As he looked down into the water, he was astonished to see that beyond the little starfish and seahorses was, in fact, a sea of dimly-glowing lights, much like the stars he had gazed upon just minutes before.

“By all the gods,” he whispered to himself.

Jibral lifted Ranib's head so that they were looking one another in the eye. “I brought you here because they cannot find you here,” he began. “This is a spot between your realm and mine. We are safe to talk here.”

For the first time in over a year, Ranib realized that his was the only presence in his mind. He breathed a long sigh of great relief.

He eyed Jibral with a hint of suspicion. “But why would you bring me here? What are we going to talk about? I am trapped within my own dream, but for once a month,” he said, shaking his head.

“We will have much to talk about,” replied Jibral, “for each of those days will be a precious chance to help prevent what evil they intend to unleash.” His expression grew quite serious. “You must work with the woman named Luda. You must trust her.”

Ranib took a step back, raising his hands. “How do you expect me to trust a woman who killed her own people?”

“It is as she said: there are much more powerful forces involved in what we are doing. There is a greater plan—if we do our parts to carry it out.”

Ranib looked around again, this time in frustration. “You know, I never believed in any of this until last year. Maybe there is some great plan. But how do we even know what it is? How will we know what to do? Why don't these damned forces take care of things by their own damned selves?” he yelled as frustration gave way to anger.

Jibral smiled as Ranib calmed down enough to listen.

“What the fuck are you smiling about?” he asked Jibral.

“I have learned a great truth that may be your answer.”

“Well? What is it!?”

“We are all a part of these great forces, not apart from them. As we seek the truth, their guidance shall stir within us.”

“Shite!” Ranib turned and began walking back to the cave.

“You must have faith, my friend. We are all where and when we need to be,” spoke Jibral, staying by the shore.

“This isn't worth the headache,” was Ranib's loud response.

Jibral put his palms to his mouth to shout. “Luda can help you. We can all save many lives. I will help from this side, my friend,” were his final words before Ranib returned to the cave.

# Fiction

## The Alfore Encounter - 52

### "The Hounds of Hades"

by CAPT Two Wolves

Janice stirred and then awakened. She sat up, arose from her bed, took two steps and would've fallen if Skonn hadn't caught her. The bed covers were in a pile at her feet.

Skonn had given up trying to keep his sleeping wife covered after she'd unconsciously tossed the bedding off for the tenth time.

"Thanks and good morning," Janice said turning Skonn's assistance into a prolonged hug.

"I forgot to mention that I typically don't sleep with many covers because they tend to entangle me. They used to call me *the queen of splat* during my rookie year at the Academy," she began explaining. "Every time there was an Alpha Shift emergency drill, I'd wind up flat on my face. It's a good thing I know how to fall, some of my fellow cadets weren't so lucky. One wound up in Sickbay with a dislocated shoulder because she'd dived from her top bunk and landed badly."

"By the way, what are you doing up so early? Did you get any sleep at all?" Janice asked after a few seconds of silence.

"Three hours, twenty-five minutes, thirty five seconds," was his quiet reply.

"Oh Skonn, that's not nearly enough rest. And you have to compete today," Janice said.

"I'm not competing, Janice," Skonn told her. "I will be participating in two demonstration matches. The remainder of the day and rest of the week I will be devoted to judging."

"That infamous Vulcan stamina?" Janice dared to ask.

"Correct."

"Well, I'm going to get cleaned up," Janice said as she picked up the sheet and duvet and put them both back on the bed. She then grabbed her cosmetic kit and stepped into the washroom.

While waiting, Skonn turned on the TriVee.

"Good morning, Gentalsbeings! This is Tarol Sama, sitting in for Evra Tecklin who is away on assignment," a Romanesque, middle aged, Bajoran male announced. "We have breaking news and an update on the Starfleet Dry dock Seven disaster. The official death toll is 256, with 90 injured and 24 unaccounted for. The Shining Path terrorist group has claimed responsibility for causing what was originally thought to be an horrific accident. They have yet to specify a motive or demands. In other intergalactic news, the compound and residence of Ga'al S'tyn'ui, Prefect of Rovon province on Romulus Prime was completely levelled by a massive explosion early this morning. Reportedly, the Prefect, his family, aides and assistants were quartered at an undisclosed location, so no one was injured or killed. The Shining Path also claimed responsibility for that incident. As in the first one, The Shining Path has yet to declare the reason why they committed

such an act of terrorism or to issue demands," the reporter stated before Skonn could click the remote off. Like Janice, he didn't want to hear any more.

*The hounds of Hades are scenting closer and closer,* he thought behind his Vulcan mask of total composure as Janice exited the steamy washroom.

"Your turn," she said as she walked past him smelling of lavender bath oil and wrapped in a silk hotel robe.

*It'll soon be my turn to make a stand when the enemy reaches my door,* Skonn thought to himself behind his carefully erected mental shield.

\*\*\*\*\*

Captains Wekk and K'Tal stood at the VIP quarters door of the USS Dionysius and buzzed for entry.

Inside, they found it to be a beehive of activity. Everything came to a halt when the Gomez's espied their guests.

Shara correctly assessed the situation, handed Victoria to Marisol, then shooed her, Jessica and the cats into one of the bedrooms. Both she and Tony sat on the living area sofa and waited.

"There's been an explosion at Drydock Seven." Wekk began. By the time she finished her report, Shara's face was soaked with silent tears. Tony, also visibly distraught, handed his wife a box of tissues. Shara refused the tissues preferring instead to use one of Victoria's clean washcloths.

"There's more," Wekk said. "The residence of Ga'al S'tyn'ui, Prefect of Rovon province on Romulus Prime was destroyed by a massive explosion early this morning." She continued on as Shara's eyes widened with horror despite her rigid Vulcan training, "The good news is, his family, aids and assistants were at an undisclosed location at the time. So there were no fatalities or injuries."

"Thank God!" Tony breathed. "There's been entirely too much death this day. Did anyone claim responsibility for this abomination?" he asked.

"Yes, a group calling themselves The Shining Path." K'Tal replied. "However, they have yet to give any reasons for their terrorist attacks, or to make any demands."

"They are rabid, unreasoning beasts! They need to be hunted down and put to death like the savages they are!" Tony exclaimed.

"I'm sure Starfleet has their best resources working on this. For now, our orders stand. We must transport you and your wife safely to Vulcan," Wekk told him.

"Those poor families," Shara lamented. "Every Starfleet officer, whether combatant or not, knows there is a distinct possibility that they could die at any moment, be it during a training exercise, by accident, due to malfunctioning equipment, sickness, alien encounters, or during the heat of battle. But nothing prepares one for a deliberate terrorist attack on innocent people."

"It all seems rather trifling that you're going to Vulcan to stand trial on trumped up charges." Tony mused aloud.

"Perhaps not," Shara responded.

"How's that?" Tony asked.

"I will prevail and slay the dragon in his den," Shara declared with a confidence she didn't really feel.

"That's the spirit!" Captain Wekk encouraged, adding. "We arrive in two days."



# Brain Benders

## ACROSS

1. \*With 30D, Inhuman whose voice causes destruction
6. Part of a nuclear arsenal, for short
10. Pond dweller
14. Bank
15. Cattle call reward
16. Llama land
17. Sour
18. "Zounds!"
19. Duo
20. Sidney Poitier film "The Slender \_\_\_"
22. "Come again?"
24. Health resort
25. Crosswise, on deck
28. Lustrous cotton fabric
30. Reprimand, with "out"
33. Lawyers' org.
34. Reply to a captain
35. Andean stew veggie
36. De \_\_\_ (posh)
38. Russian country house
42. Long. crosser
43. \*Domed city of the Inhumans hidden on the moon
45. Embrace
46. Moon of Saturn
48. Self-satisfied
49. U.N. workers' grp.
50. 100 quintars
52. Arapaho foe
53. Glance over
54. Veneer
57. Pick up on
59. Be beholden to

60. Hear
62. Belief in God
66. Poker action
68. Cozy home
71. Show host
72. Luau strings
73. Sheltered, nautically
74. "Moving right \_\_\_"
75. Tennis ranking
76. Hate group
77. \*Late Queen of the Inhumans

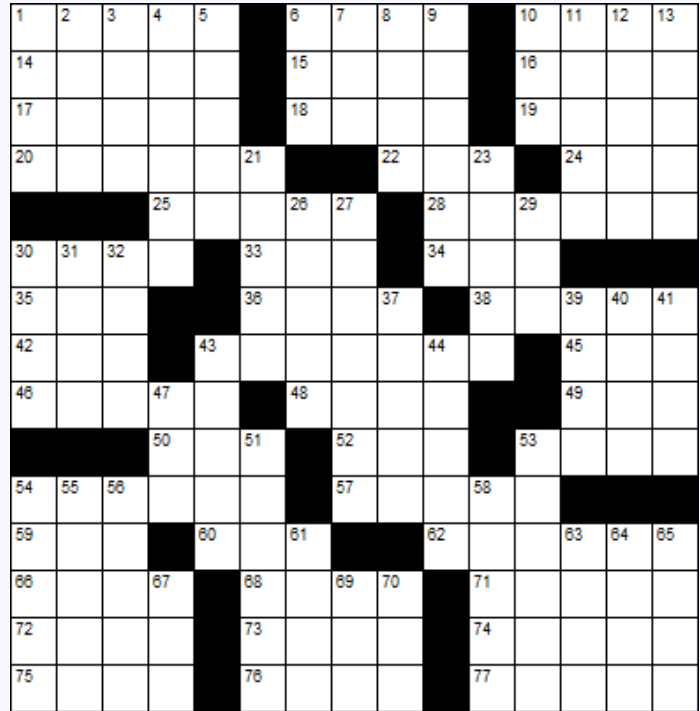


## DOWN

1. Utter without thinking
2. Peace Nobelist Walesa
3. Allege
4. Cheerios, e.g.
5. Shish \_\_\_
6. Intense anger
7. Minor player
8. Hardly thrilling
9. \*Inhuman who had the ability to control and move her hair
10. Smartphone download
11. Lend-\_\_\_ Act
12. Bellyache
13. \*Royal Guard member who became its head after supporting the coup against the throne
21. Coped (with)
23. "Surprise

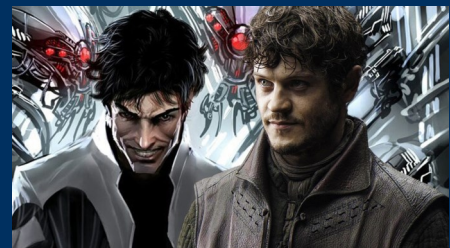
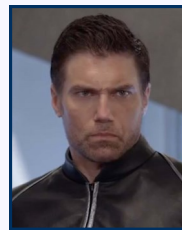
- Symphony" composer
26. Borders on
27. \*Usurper of the throne who banished the rest of the Inhuman Royal Family
29. Steeped beverage
30. \*See 1A
31. Brazilian berry
32. Electrical power unit
37. Extract with a solvent
39. Mod
40. Sinuous dance
41. \*Late King of the Inhumans
43. Concerning
44. Operative
47. Boxer Laila
51. \*Royal advisor whose head trauma in a fall on Earth hampered his powers
53. Tasteful
54. \*Royal Guard member sent to echolocate the Inhuman Royal Family for capture
55. Conscious
56. Mob scene
58. Wind \_\_\_
61. Cheerleader's cheer
63. Desktop figure
64. E-mail command
65. Prefix with byte
67. Kind of trip
69. Poseidon's domain
70. Countdown start

## ESB Crockett's Spirited Crossword Puzzle \*Those Who Aren't Exactly Human - Part 1 by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa - January 2018



## Answers to Previous Puzzle

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





# More Brain Benders

## SUDOKU PUZZLE

January 2018  
Very Easy, Symmetrical  
by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to December's Sudoku Puzzle  
Hard, Non-Symmetrical

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

## WORD SEARCH

January's Topic: Ken Leung Roles  
Look for 29 character names  
by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to December's Word Search:  
Stephen Moyer Roles

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

# Brain Benders

## Word Search

### January's Word List:

Art Editor	Liu Tsung-Yuan
Barry	Lloyd Bowman
Bernie Li	Ming
Don	Mo
Dr. Mikao	Peng
Fung	Sam Wong
Gene	Sang
John Kim	Shen Yuan
Johnny	Shopkeeper
Karnak	Stephen Wong
Ken Arata	Tech Chung
Kid Omega	Terrence
Leon Tao	Willie
Li	Wing
Liam Liu	



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Starbase Commander

Brig. Gen. Drego Tensa  
Starbase Vice Commander  
Editor, Crockett's Spirit

CDRE Logan Kale  
Starbase Executive Officer

CAPT Y'Wanna  
Chief, ESB Recreations

CAPT Shayle Carter  
Deputy Chief, ESB Recreations  
Entertainment Section Leader

Simm Team Leader  
Trivia Host  
Staff Writer

CAPT Bond  
Security Officer

CAPT Two Wolves  
Senior Staff Writer

Col. Shreya Rose  
Staff Writer

Capt Wynan  
Senior Staff Writer

LT Ashinaga  
Staff Writer

LTJG Star Eagle  
Staff Writer

Dennis Howard  
Editorial Writer  
Critic

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