



# Crockett's Spirit

*Impavidus Scribere Veritas — The Brave Write the Truth*



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## Fiction

### **Vanthea: Tyranny's Dawn**

#### **Book 2 - ELZIVRETH**

by LTJG Star Eagle

JUST AS HE'D promised, Jaen held the torch for Elzivreth as the two examined one of the ancient pillars in the sacred hall. Twenty-eight such pillars formed the perimeter of the ancient temple; this one was the twenty-fourth. The twenty-three before it covered over seven thousand years of history, from the Age of Wondrous Machines to the Rise of the Undying One. The four beyond this one had no markings; the events that were to mark them had not yet occurred. The ancient magicks that carved the glowing glyphs and pictures into the stones, even the magicks of the first great sorcerers, had limits.

Elzivreth was completely focused on this particular pillar. On its four-foot facing, the chiseled image of Gul-Gothra being killed by Prince Dacien glowed both faintly and eerily. Dacien, surrounded by several white wisps of smoke to indicate friendly spirits, had his sword thrust into the decaying body of the undead king. Above him lay the image of a falling tower. Gul-Gothra had an arm outstretched behind him, however, pointing to some kind of ephemeral portal through which several dark wisps of smoke—dark spirits—were coming. Below all three figures lay one giant eye, and above them all and the tower blazed a comet of many tails.

"It's all here—all the events of five years ago," Elzivreth mentioned aloud. "I have looked at it time

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## Fiction

### **Star Wars - Ashi's Shame**

#### **Ch. 18: Past Mistakes & Future Hope**

by LT Ashinaga

Ashi and Grask stood once again in the middle of the throne room. Grask shivered so hard now that it worried Ashi. Matron Askos had not come in.

"Don't be so nervous. I'll protect you. I believe you." Ashi hoped to assuage the poor, shivering man's fears.

Grask chattered for a moment and then said, "I'm not as scared as I am cold."

Ashi had to think about that. It was not all that warm in here, but it certainly wasn't as frigid as Grask looked. Then it dawned on him. "Oh, right. You're Trandoshan, you're cold blooded."

Grask quickly nodded and held his arms against him. "I need warmth, a fire, or at least some sunlight."

Just then Askos walked in with two men behind her. The servants each held the end of a large rolled up piece of fabric. She waved at a nearby guard. "By all means, open a window."

The guard bowed his head to her and then found the drape that covered a tall window. He pulled it aside and the mid-afternoon sun came through. Grask stood in the rays of light and still shivered. It would take a bit for his system to gather heat from the sunlight.

Askos sat down on her throne, took a moment to give Ashi a good examination, and then said, "You've obviously repaired our friend's translator. Such a clever Jedi," she mused.

Ashi nodded to her. "Thank you. Yes, he is now able to speak to us."

She looked at the shivering Grask. "And what does the man have to say? I hope it justifies the fear he spread across two cities of our people."

Grask gulped and gave Ashi a fearful look. Ashi smiled. "Go ahead. Tell her."

Grask softly spoke. "Matron Askos," He tried again with a louder voice. "Matron Askos, I'm very

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and time again, and it only made partial sense until now.”

“It definitely makes more sense now, in light of what happened yesterday,” responded Jaen.

“More sense, but still not enough,” was her reply.

“Well, my dear, just what do we do now?” asked the old man, smiling as he usually did.

“We must examine any prophecies or portents that might mention these events,” she began after a pause, “and I believe that the comet is the key. I seem to remember some writings regarding a comet as well as other celestial events.”

“Well, hopefully that should narrow things down a bit,” he started, “but we’re still going to have a lot of searching to do.”

“We’d best get to it, then, hm?” she turned to him with a look of both curiosity and expectation.

“Now wait a minute;” protested Jaen, “you’ve been in such a hurry this morning that I haven’t even had a pipe yet.”

She stared at him as he brought up his finger and pointed at her. “Not to mention breakfast!”

She rolled her eyes.

“Damn it! I hate it when you do that!” he retorted.

“Alright, alright; have your smoke then.”

The old man reached into his left pocket in his blue cloak. He reached around in it for several seconds, his face contorted in frustration. After a bit, he looked up sheepishly. “I forgot it,” was all he could muster.

Elzivreth pointed to the opening at the front of the temple, and the two made their way through it, along the curved hall, down the stairs that descended twenty feet of earth, down to the Library of the Living World, a concentric ring just below the temple itself with four rooms that were each some twenty feet wide. Here lay the true treasure of the temple: shelves and counters filled with papers, scrolls, books and tomes, the writings of poets, archivists, historians, playwrights, prophets and mages from all over the world—all from the past seven millenia. As the sacred element of fire could transform wood into heat, so too the sacred knowledge kept here both could and had transformed people’s lives.

Elzivreth waited for Jaen to catch up to her. As he approached, she pulled out his pipe from one of her pockets and swung it out just in front of him. He paused suddenly, his surprise quickly turning into a grin. “Thank you, dear heart,” he spoke, gently pulling at it from her hand.

“You are welcome,” she answered softly, still holding on to it, “but you will smoke it out here,” she finished, finally releasing it to her husband.

Jaen frowned, but only for a second. “You are right, of course.”

As she entered the sacred library, the magickal torches sensed her approach and burned brighter. She made her way to the center of the area, a small

round room with a central pillar and three other openings. They led to corresponding sections of history and science, culture and literature, magick and prophecy. She walked through the one to her left and then took a right into the prophecy section. Before long, Jaen was with her, and the two sat down together amidst the various aged tomes.

They spent the morning hours carefully examining every chapter and sentence of the books they were reading. While Elzivreth began at the front of the list, Jaen took the back end.

“So,” started Jaen, finally needing a distraction, “has anything piqued your interest yet?”

She closed the book she’d been examining. “I have searched through the prophecies of both Ann the Wise and Clark the Far-Seeing. I have seen nothing of use,” she sighed. She put the old book back on the shelf, skipped a book, and then pulled out another. “I shall now endure the prophecies of Dalen the Observant. And what of your efforts?” she inquired.

He frowned. “I am finally finished with the tome of Vincent the Merciful. And, like you, I am at a loss. I am going out for another pipe,” he said, slowly rising, “and you, my dear, have skipped a book.” He grinned at her ornerily.

“Oh yes...thank you,” she replied more quietly than normal, slowly rising to pull the dark red book from the shelf. She sat back down, setting it atop the book she had just pulled down before. She stared at it in silence as her husband left.

As Jaen returned a few minutes later, he noticed that she was still staring at that red book, her hands on her lap, her face without expression. He came to her and touched her back with his hand. She reacted by flattening back her cat-like ears.

“Elzivreth, what is it?” he demanded, this time out of concern rather than impatience.

The eldir was rarely at a loss for words; this was one of those times. Finally, she spoke. “I am loathe to read this book. Can you not feel its darkness?” she asked, almost in disbelief.

Jaen took a closer look at the tome. “Ahhh,” he said as he read the title and the revelation came to him, “‘The Ravings of Carotis.’ So you feel its power that strongly?”

She sighed, closing her eyes. “I have tried to read it twice before. Each time I have felt their suffering...what the mages and their book did to them...to her...”

You mean the Book of the Flesh, don’t you?” replied Jaen, taking a seat beside her and placing his hand gently upon her back.

The book was known by other names: the Tome of the Reversal, the Book of the Chaotic Realm, the Creation of Unlife, the Tome of Abomination—but some whispered its name by the material of which it was allegedly composed.

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“The story goes that great mages tried to create a realm that combined the realms of both the living and the dead, and the book was their instrument,” Jaen spoke softly.

“Oh yes,” Elzivreth responded, “and they created a realm where everything alive came to death, and every dead thing came back to life—but corrupted and warped.”

“And as I recall, the mages asked Carotis and several priests to help them seal it up forever, for they lacked the power to do so.”

“They didn’t understand that true creation only happens with divine love, not just intent and power,” she reckoned.

“No, they didn’t,” he agreed, “and that incident is what spurred the founding of the Magocracy.”

She turned to look at his face. “The book drew them in to its corruption. It had already become a great evil by that point.” She looked at the book. “They had to make their way to the center of the realm to subdue its power. They were attacked by creatures only the mad could conceive, passing through rifts in time and space that eventually killed them all--”

“--All but Carotis,” responded Jaen, softly, “and it stripped her of her sanity. And, as the story goes, she wrote down all that she was seeing and experiencing on her way to the vortex at the center of it all, while she still was of sound mind—and that is how ‘The Ravings’ came about,” he finished.

Elzivreth placed her hands on the red tome. “These pages are full of her memories, her madness...all the chaotic energies that come from reckless ignorance.”

Jaen took the tome from under her hands and slowly opened it, doing so with great respect. “We shall examine it together, and only together. I will not leave you until we are done,” he reassured her.

And so they read, page after senseless page, trying to make some sense of what seemed like nothing more than the blathering passages of a tortured soul. From time to time, Jaen looked inquisitively at his wife, wondering if she had any revelation about what they had just read. Time and time again, she just shook her head “No,”

Finally, after a good hour’s reading, she lifted up her finger and said “Here!” She placed her finger on the passage. It read:

The beacon shall become a gate;  
Their multitudes they will be calling.

Jaen read it and then looked to her, puzzled. “This is supposed to mean something?”

“Yes; trust me,” she answered. “This is the first passage that is full of her clarity, not her chaos.”

They read a bit further until Elzivreth raised her finger again.

Who knows what horror lies in wait  
Beneath the magick tower falling?

“It rhymes with the first passage,” observed Jaen. “You think she knew about the Spire?” he asked.

“It is a possibility. She was seeing events in the future as well as the past, as well as things quite far away.”

“How could this be related to the first passage?”

She paused a second. “I am not sure, my dear, but it is the second moment of complete clarity that I have found.”

“Alright,” the old man responded, still unsure.

Not long after, they found yet another passage:

So that his masters now may stay,  
Empow’red to living bodies fill.

“It’s part of a separate thought,” he remarked.

“Yes, it is—the second part of a thought. So then, this means that it is not in the correct order.”

“How do you know that?” he asked her. When she began to speak, he raised his hand and smiled. “I know, I know; trust you.”

Eventually they completed reading the entire work, finding and marking eight such passages in all. Jaen got up to smoke his pipe. Elzivreth went over the passages in her mind. She could feel the spirit of Carotis, how much this woman endured simply to put ink to parchment to make sure that the right person would read these very words at the right time. Something was still wrong, though. While each passage had a sense unto itself, the collection’s true meaning still evaded her.

“Son of a whore!” Jaen exclaimed, walking back to the library as fast as his aged body and staff could take him.

Now Elzivreth was confused. She didn’t even have the chance to respond to his outburst before he started speaking again.

“She went through both time and space, right?”

“Yes,” she responded.

“And all that magick came out from the center of the realm, right?”

“Yes,” she answered.

His eyes brightened as excitement took him. And she wrote what she was seeing on her way in!”

“Yes, we know tha--”

“So what if she saw all these things in reverse!” he declared. He placed his hands on her shoulders.

“You mean, that she was seeing the far future before the near future?”

“Yes, yes!” he exclaimed. “After all, everything was backward!”

He quickly reopened the book to the marker of the last passage—and he tore the page from the tome.

Elzivreth immediately protested, trying to stop

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him. "Stop this! These are sacred writings!"

He held her at arm's length. "Yes, they are sacred. And they are important. But we need them in the right order. Now, it's your turn to trust me!"

She knew he was right. She sighed in resignation. He resumed his vandalism, finally placing all eight passages in the reverse order from which they had first been read. He brushed aside all the books on the table and spread them out so both he and she could read them:

The dead mage thinks himself a king;  
In truth, he's but a servant

His masters he calls forth to bring,  
Their lust for flesh most fervent.

He conjures magicks foul and dark  
To bind each spirit to a shell,

But though he tries to tame the spark,  
That power lies beyond his spell.

Instead, he works to find a way--  
Possessing flesh against its will--

So that his masters now may stay,  
Empow'ered to living bodies fill.

Who knows what horror lies in wait  
Beneath the magick tower falling?

The beacon shall become a gate;  
Their multitudes they will be calling.

"She saw it all..." said Elzivreth in wonder, "the Undying One, the collapse of the Spire, his terrifying experiments...all here." She turned to look at her husband.

"And she knew that they were tied together," he responded. "Whatever evil is coming this way, he used that accursed tower to call it here."

Elzivreth spoke coldly. "We thought we were rid of Gul-Gothra's influence." She shuddered. Then, she looked at Jaen with grave concern. "Apparently, we were wrong."

Jaen reread the last few passages. "Every passage she wrote is in the present tense, except for the last one," he observed, placing his finger on it. "But *this* one is in the future tense."

"Some part of Carotis must have known who would be reading this, and when," pondered the eldir. "Perhaps it is another message."

"Or a clue," answered Jaen. "Maybe all these events have occurred in *our* past, and in *our* present."

"But the final passage yet remains in our future." She started looking at the other tomes on the shelves. "When...we need to know when this will happen."

"I agree," began Jaen, "but we could spend many a day here looking up celestial events and data. We need to know which events these verses correspond to, if any."

"Yes—a bridge, if you please," replied the eldrin woman. She rose from the table, slowly looking over each of the books on the shelves before them. "The answers are not with these books; we have to go to another shelf," she murmured.

"How do you know this?" asked Jaen.

"If you cease speaking, I can keep listening to them," she whispered, now moving slowly but intently to another shelf in a different part of the library entirely. Jaen followed.

Elzivreth stood at the shelf, stretching out her right hand to actually feel the books. Every few seconds she simply muttered "No..." until her hand came across an aged scrollcase. She then smiled. "So, it is you!" she finally spoke, removing the dusty case from the shelf. Despite its apparent age, the case itself was in such good shape it indicated little actual use.

"You know that this is the geography section, do you not?" Jaen remarked with a smirk.

She smiled back. "But this is not a geography map," she replied, opening the case to reveal a scroll of gray vellum. Jaen came to her and helped her very carefully unroll the scroll upon an open table. Before them lay a map of the dominion of Vrenzia, one of the Obsidian Empire's most western regions. Then Elzivreth reached into her right pocket and pulled out a small leather bag. Inside were several of her magickal stones. She opened the bag and reached in to find two stones that would be perfect for this circumstance. She didn't need to look at the stones; she'd had some of them for over three hundred years, and her fingers recognized their shape and composition instantly.

"There you are," she said, pulling out a gray and a white moonstone. She brought them to her lips, hummed quietly and then said two ancient magickal words. Now the moonstones glowed brightly. She placed the gray stone on her nodule in her forehead, where it stayed on its own accord.

"Sister Gray, I call upon you to pierce the veil between the realms and to remove any obfuscations of the truth," she spoke.

Instantly the picture of the map disappeared, as did the gray coloring of the vellum itself. What remained was now a blank sheet of cream-colored vellum.

Jaen kept it flat so they would be able to read it once Elzivreth was finished. "Well, your instincts have been right so far," he assured her.

She pulled the gray stone from her nodule and replaced it with the white stone. "Sister White, I ask that you illuminate that which has been hidden until now. Shine your light of truth upon this scroll so that

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we may see what must be revealed.”

The vellum itself began to glow faintly. Slowly, letters appeared and formed into words, and the words formed into verses.

Elzivreth took the white moonstone away from her nodule. As she held both stones in her hand, she thanked them for their help and then spoke another magickal word. When they stopped glowing, she put them back in her bag and put the bag into her pocket.

“Well, ‘tis a good thing I can read upside down,” remarked Jaen. “It is also good that I know Urgani.”

“Yes it is, my husband, for I am certain your aptitude is better than mine,” she smiled.

“This is strange, considering this work bears the signature of Ruzette the Gracious,” he commented, pointing to the words at the top of the page while keeping it held down, “and we both know that she was not Urgish.”

“Perhaps it is a last step to insuring that only the right people or person would actually learn this,” she commented, trying to make out the words as best she could.

“I could read it aloud for both of us if you like, my dear,” offered Jaen, noticing her difficulty.

She sighed and then spoke. “Alright—if you insist.” Elzivreth had always valued her ability to do, think and learn for herself. Depending on others for anything—even her husband—was simply not in her nature. This was one of those instances, however, when she simply had no choice but to depend on Jaen. He knew it, too. In fact, he always had a knack of knowing her limits almost as well as she did. He wasn’t always kind about it, but he was almost always right. This time, at least, he was kind.

Jaen read aloud the following passages:

“The Omens of Ruzette the Gracious, to be read by the Ones for whom these words were intended.”

“When the World Soul Sleeps,  
Mark Ye well the Movements of  
the Firmament, of Comets,  
Moons, the Planets and Stars.  
Four Omens have I seen:”

“The First Omen: A Comet;  
How splendidly it reveals its  
Glory in the Winternight, and  
How suddenly it shatters,  
Disappearing into great Shiar’kun.  
Rejoice and despair, for as  
One Tyranny shall meet its End,  
Another Tyranny shall find its Voice.  
But lo! The Mother’s Hand  
Shall come to Those who need Her.”

“The Second Omen:  
When three Moons light the Demon’s Eye.

The Obsidian shall splinter and crack;  
Dark Secrets are now revealed.  
A Bridge now spans the Void,  
Releasing the Prisoners.  
Though the Father saves the Mother,  
The Children are scattered utterly.”

“The Third Omen:  
Four Planets form a giant Square,  
Perfectly framing the Mother and Father.  
Four Babes shall be born,  
Along with their Champions.  
Though the World Soul still lies sleeping,  
New Hope is awakened.  
The Babes must be scattered to bring  
Long-hidden Truths to bear.  
Another’s Sign shall take Them in.”

“The Fourth Omen:  
As a new Star shines in  
The Light Bearer’s Torch,  
The Children shall be reunited.  
Each One shall know a First Song,  
A sacred Spell of Old, and the  
Temple which was begun shall be completed.  
The Mother and Father shall greet Them,  
While the Prisoners gather around  
Them for one final Stand.  
The Great Cycle ends, and thus begins anew;  
That which was sleeping is now awake,  
And Songs of Mourning  
Shall transform into Songs of Joy.”

They looked at one another. After a pause to let absorb the new revelation, Jaen finally spoke. “To the Sciences section, then?”

They both made their way to the next section with all the speed they each could muster. It only took a few moments for them to open up the tomes they needed.

“The First Omen obviously refers to events from five years ago,” began Elzivreth, “so we need no information on that.”

“My wife,” said Jaen.

She looked at him. “Yes, my husband?”

“This is my question,” he began. “When the comet passed over the world, and the Spire collapsed, and all those other things happened...”

“Yes?” she replied, now slightly annoyed.

“Did you not think to look up this event five years ago?”

She paused before speaking. “So many events had transpired: the Spire fell, Prince Dacien died in battle, the comet, and the arrival of Istrelle and Delendra. I didn’t know where to begin, in all candor. So, before I did anything else, I consulted the reading stones.”

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Jaen thought about what she had said and realized she was right. He changed his tone a bit. "I agree; consulting the stones was probably the right thing to do. What did they tell you?"

Elzivreth relaxed. "They told me to take care of my family and to focus on my daily tasks. The events we saw could only be understood in the light of the future, when we would receive more clues to this giant puzzle," she finished, feeling a strange sense of relief.

"Well, here we are, then," mentioned Jaen, returning to his tome. He looked at her and smiled. "And we have the clues as to what will happen. Now we just need to know *when*."

Elzivreth gently turned a page in her tome. "We are looking for conjunctions and alignments."

"I believe I have found one," started Jaen, "a trinary alignment of three moons in the constellation of the Demon; it will happen this coming Winternight!" he exclaimed.

"Are you certain?"

"I have never been more so!"

Elzivreth felt something rising deep within her that she had not experienced in many years: panic. She beat it back within her. "We really do not have much time left, then."

She found some information as well. "I am reading here a planetary conjunction, a perfect square, surrounding the constellation of the Parents—the Mother and the Father," she remarked. "The time for this is sixteen years hence."

"Sixteen years, you say?" asked Jaen. He knew better than to ask her if she was sure of her findings. "This suggests a long process."

"Of course, that would be reasonable if we are dealing with children who have not yet been born, becoming adults to vanquish this coming tyranny," was her response.

"But the fourth omen didn't say that," Jaen interjected.

"What do you mean?" she retorted.

"It doesn't state that these 'Children' would necessarily be adults when these events happen," was his answer.

She reviewed the last omen in her mind, mentally reciting it word for word. He was correct; she had made an assumption.

"That is quite true, my dear," she replied, "as well as the fact that no one can predict the coming of a 'new star.'" She slumped slightly, disappointed.

"I guess we'll have to keep our eyes on the heavens for more than the cycles of the seasons," Jaen mused.

Through all of this, neither one of them heard the soft echoes of small feet wandering down the stairs to the library. They did not see the figure of the girl who was now standing behind them. All that they heard was an ancient voice, a powerful voice, which gave them a command: "You need to sleep. You must deep dream *now*."

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sorry for what I've done. I never meant to be part of such a terrible scheme. I needed money and Drak offered a lot for this job. I didn't know he planned on taking hostages and threatening innocent people."

"What did you expect then?" Askos asked.

"I needed money to get home. My brother was a famous bounty hunter and mercenary, I traveled with him on his last venture so I could pick up special supplies from a world he would be stopping at. He was killed and I was stranded when they took all our money. Drak assumed I was like my brother Grenor, a skilled mercenary, and offered a lot of money to take care of a job with him. He did not tell anyone all his plans, only that I would help him escort a rogue Jedi back to the Empire. My brother has supported me for most of my life, my people do not understand me. Now, what I have done has disgraced myself before my gods and I won't be able to go home."

Askos was frowning as she listened to him. "What are you? Why are you an outcast among your people?"

"I'm not an outcast, they simply don't value my work like they do the hunters." He glanced away out of the habit of being ashamed for his talent. "I'm an artist. Sculptor primarily, but I also paint. I provide the artwork for our temples and meeting halls. That's what I was looking for with my brother, special items for my work. I may not be treasured among other Trandoshans, but I love what I do."

"What, then, is your disgrace that would bar you from going home?" Askos asked.

"I ran from battle." His translator spoke clearly, but his own speech was practically inaudible. "At the port where we first landed, we took the entire town hostage, by threatening their children. I didn't know what to do. I was scared, but I followed Drak's orders. I didn't want to hurt anyone, honestly. I never shot back, I never even pointed my gun at the people I was told to guard. When they started fighting back, I ran. A Trandoshan does not run from battle, it is a disgrace that our gods cannot abide."

Askos had a gentle smile on her face. "I'm sorry you feel rejected by your gods, but we are thankful you chose the honorable path."

Grask continued, ready to tell his story to the end. "I followed Trevis here, not sure what to do. I didn't want to kill anyone, but I was scared that your people would kill me. I didn't know who to trust. When the moment came and I knew that Trevis was going to kill everyone in spite, I just shot. I've never killed anyone before." He hung his head low. "I'm no Trandoshan. I deserve to be executed."

Ashi walked over and put his hand on the green scaled man's shoulder. "For what it's worth. You did the right thing. We see no shame in you here."

Askos now spoke to Ashi. "Do you believe his story?"

Ashi saw the look in Grask's eyes, he answered

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her. "A Trandoshan willing to tell a story of shame about his life is no liar. I vouch for him."

Askos was surprised to hear this. "Do you now? You vouch for him. In this hall, in this palace, those words are more important. I hope you understand that?"

"I do. I know of the ancient traditions. I know I'm taking responsibility for his actions. If he violates my trust, it is my life that can be taken as payment, as well as his. But, I trust him."

"Then let it be known throughout all the tribes of our people, that Grask the Trandoshan owes his life and allegiance to Ashi the Jedi. And that Ashi the Jedi has made a life vouch for the honor of Grask the Trandoshan." Askos decreed this and it would be sent to all the chiefs by special messenger.

Grask asked, "What does this mean?"

"It means you owe your life to me. I'm responsible for your conduct. Once you prove your honor to me, I can release you of service and you'll be free."

Grask neatly bowed to Ashi. "Then I'll help you stop Drak by any means I'm capable of."

"I do have a few questions I need answered," Ashi said.

"Anything."

Ashi walked around the Trandoshan. "Why does that man want me so badly?"

"There's a bounty on all Jedi. A Jedi, dead or alive, is worth ten million imperial credits."

Askos laughed. "Wow!"

Ashi knew about a bounty on his head, but he hadn't learned it was so great. "I guess that's why he's so desperate. Finding rogue Jedi isn't easy." He looked at Grask and asked, "What about that lightsaber of his? He cannot be a Sith?"

"No. He isn't. He bought that on the black market to fight you with. My brother told me that Drak, the slaver, was a master swordsman. He would show off his skills to the Hutts and kill prisoners for sport. I wouldn't underestimate him with that weapon."

"Thank you," Ashi answered.

Askos got up and walked over to Grask. "You're truly shivering worse than anything I've seen." She summoned one of the men in the room. "Guard, take the servant of Ashi to a room with a fire."

Grask smiled and hissed out, "Thank you, your highness." He followed the guard out of the room, rubbing his hands on his arms the whole way.

Askos frowned. "Such a strange people." She now grinned at Ashi, giving him that lusty look again. "Tell me, how do you know so much about our ancient traditions and history?"

"History?"

"I overheard you talking to your friend there about the history embroidered on the tapestries in the sitting room. I was impressed. Very few Jahalans truly know our full history. It's passed down through the generations of my family and the families of all of the chiefs, but it isn't spoken of much. How did you learn about it?"

"While I was training under Master Roh at the Jedi

Temple," Ashi explained, "he encouraged me to look up my people in the Jedi archives. I was surprised to see such a wealth of information buried in the archives about us. I learned all I could since I had very little real contact with home."

"Your master must've been proud of such a good student." She caressed the hilt of one of his swords as it stuck up from where it rested against his back. "What can you tell me about your swords?" Askos asked. "I'm curious as to how you came by them. They certainly aren't the weapons of a Jedi."

"They're rare swords made of a strong metal that can cut through almost anything." Ashi pulled his swords out and held one in each hand. "I know they are the heirloom of my former Jahalan instructor, Master Binjin. He willed them to me. They're made of a unique metal and are impervious to energy weapons and dulling. Only a lightsaber would cut through them."

"Impressive." Askos returned to her throne and gestured to two men who had with them a large, scrolled piece of fabric. They unrolled it and revealed an ancient tapestry deteriorating at the edges, but well preserved in the middle.

Ashi stood over it and was stunned to see a figure in the center holding up two blades just like his. "What's this?"

"This is the Tapestry of Tellith the first, the chief of the Sorkon tribe during the Grand Unification Conquests eons ago." Askos walked around it. "It tells of his story, how he united our people and brought the advanced technology of the Sorkon tribe to everyone. Those two swords were his badge of office."

Ashi held up his swords to look at them. "My swords?"

"Yes. The swords of Sorkon are unique. Their legend was passed down through my family, few others know it. Even your Jedi Archives obviously did not know. They were the crown of the original Sorkonian empire. Tellith the first had them constructed, it took five years of work by the best metalsmiths of our people. He passed them to his son, and they continued to be the badge of office until the T'kon conquered us. One hundred years of slavery later, we returned but the swords were no longer the badge of office for the leader of our people. They stayed in the family of Tellith the first but left Sorkonia when Nolith moved the capital to your village forty years ago. His son, Binjin, bore them as his weapons."

Ashi softly gasped. "Binjin was Nolith's son?"

"Yes. Binjin was the rightful heir of the Tellith Dynasty, but he had no son. The plague killed his family."

Ashi asked, "Does this make me the heir of the dynasty? I inherited the blades, I was adopted by Binjin."

"No," she answered. "The council of chiefs gathered when Binjin died and discussed his choice to bequeath the blades to you. Some rejected the notion of the blades going to you, but they were all silenced by the law. You were the rightful heir of Binjin through adoption. His choice could not be countered. But, since it did not seem that you would ever return to rule the people

*(Continued on page 8)*

*(Continued from Page 7)*

in his stead, a new heir was appointed by the chiefs. The elected successor of Nolith was giving the title as head chief of the Jahalan people.”

Ashi frowned and cocked his head. “Why are you telling me this?”

Askos walked around the unfurled tapestry and got rather close to Ashi. “The chiefs have discussed Drak’s ultimatum and come to two conclusions. One, it is in the best interest of Jahala to send you to him. Two, it is not our right to tell you to sacrifice yourself, that is your choice.”

Ashi gave off a sarcastic laugh. “Those are the only choices. Which will it be then?”

“Both. We’re going to ask you to solve this problem to keep our people safe. But, we’ll let you decide how you solve it.” She pointed to the blades in his hands. “You’re not the ruler of Jahala, but you have a responsibility to Binjin and his dynasty to preserve our way of life. The duty of any ruler is to defend and protect the people. He trusted you with that responsibility. Now the time has come to fulfill the destiny.”

Ashi put the blades back. “I need some time to meditate on this. I cannot come up with an answer right now.”

“Stay here in the palace and prepare yourself.” She brushed her hand down his furry chest. “Relax, but for only one day. You do not have a lot of time.” Her finger was twirling in the thick mane hair on his chest.

He stepped back from her and bowed. “Thank you.”

She walked back to her throne while the men rolled up the ancient tapestry. “Guards, show our guests to the suites and have all of their needs met.” She sat down and gave Ashi a charming smile. “Should you need me, just tell one of the guards and I will be there.”

Ashi bowed out and followed a guard away from the throne room.

\* \* \* \* \*

Drak waited inside the small shuttle. The message he had sent wouldn’t lead them back here, so he was hidden from their hunters. If these cats were wise they would take his offer and hand that Jedi over to him. However, if they were smart, they’d check out his claim. This was entirely a bluff.

The first day was drawing to a close and he gave them two more to bring him the Jedi. What next? What if they didn’t? This time, he didn’t have hostages to bargain with. All he had was a phony claim about the Empire. In three days if that Jedi isn’t here, they will know it was a ruse. The Empire won’t be in orbit and no one will be coming to attack.

Drak’s stomach growled and he sneered. Looking around the antique shuttlecraft he found a small nutrition bar he had been rationing. It annoyed him to think that here he was, sitting in the rotting carcass of a broken down old Republic shuttle when he should be enjoying ten million Imperial credits and the lifestyle they would buy.

“I have to up the ante,” He muttered. “I can’t bluff my way out of this one.”

He activated the com system and checked its hyper-

space antennae. It wasn’t very good, but it would suffice for what he was going to do. If there was anything Drak knew, it was communications equipment. Most of his criminal schemes involved him hacking into the com systems of banks and local governments to send them false signals or monitor their local police. He had already jury-rigged this system to transmit a signal across the entire planet, which was rather impressive considering. Now he had a much more distant target in mind. He had set the solar collector to charge the batteries in case he needed to send another signal. They were full and he had a plan.

“There, that should work,” Drak said and activated the signal.

Suddenly the holographic image of Commander Nellis seated at her desk appeared. She looked around with great confusion. “Who is this? Did you get authorization for this signal?”

Drak smiled at her. “No. I hacked your personal signal. Trust me, the old com system on Devon is hardly a challenge.”

“You had better explain...wait, aren’t you the one who came to me with a Jedi report?”

“Yes,” Drak answered, “and I’ve confirmed the sighting, yet again. I’ve had...trouble obtaining him. But, I’ll have him in three days. What I need is transportation. In three days, can you send a ship here to retrieve him and pick me up?”

Nellis was beyond annoyed. “Do you think the Empire is a travel service for your personal use?! The law clearly states you must bring the Jedi back to us for examination. We aren’t going to waste our time looking for you. For this intrusion, I will personally put you on report with the local authorities and...”

“Commander. I have a deal for you.” Drak interrupted her attempt at shutting the signal down, which she couldn’t the way he rigged it.

“What sort of deal?”

“In three days, send a ship with soldiers here to pick me and the Jedi up. I should have his body to bring back by then. If I don’t, I’ll willingly hand myself over to you for proper punishment. You can even fill out a wanted report so that it appears that you caught a fugitive. I know that the Empire rewards its commanders for finding fugitives, especially bad ones. You can put whatever you want on the report, call me a drug smuggler, call me a Jedi myself, I don’t care. But, if I have a Jedi, I also know that the Empire will reward you for his capture or death. I want my reward, you’ll get one either way if you accept my offer.”

Nellis was tapping her chin. She had already had one of the worst weeks of her career. The idea of getting a fat reward from the empire was tempting. “Fine. It’s your head if this fails. I’ll send a ship, just give me the coordinates.”

“My pleasure.” Drak sent her the coordinates and then cut the signal off.

He sat back and laughed. He now had what he wanted all along. When that Imperial ship starts landing troops to get him, the people will panic and eagerly hand over the Jedi. It was still a bluff, but this time, it had teeth.



# Fiction

## The Alfore Encounter - 53

### "Doom and Gloom"

by CAPT Two Wolves

Skonn thought that Janice was going to get dressed. However, she turned and got right up into his face. Shades of her late brigadier general father.

"Skonn, what the hell is going on? And don't give me that *I can't tell you* bravo sierra!" she said in a low but unmistakable command voice.

"You have heard the news reports. The Shining Path is a terrorist group bent on causing intergalactic destruction and death," Skonn replied quietly as Janice's eyes drilled into his.

"Why the the U.S.S. Valkyrie, and the why U.S.S. Eclipse? Why Dry Dock Seven and my ship? Why one thousand plus deaths and so many injured and missing?"

"They have not stated their demands so we do not know," Skonn replied calmly.

"Even if they did state their demands, Starfleet does not capitulate to terrorist threats," Janice said quoting long standing official doctrine.

"Which will mean more destruction and death," Skonn responded..

"Could it mean our possible demise?" Janice asked.

"Affirmative," Skonn replied. "However, I do not believe that will occur."

"Why not?"

"Because Malili predicted that you will bear me a son," Skonn said.

"Do you realize how illogical that statement sounds, Skonn? You, a Vulcan schooled in logic from the moment you were born, believe a prophetess?" Janice asked.

"It is more of believing in statistical odds. So far two of her predictions have come true, so the odds of you giving birth are indeed very high. You cannot give birth if you are deceased, Janice. Needless to say, we must stay vigilant despite the odds," He said as he glanced at the chrono on the night table.

"We'd better shake a leg," Janice said, taking the hint. Skonn headed for the shower and she proceeded to get dressed. However, she stopped by the recliner where she'd left her knitting last night.

"I thought I only knit three rows," she mused aloud as she held up her now completed project. She checked the end of the scarf and found her brightly colored stitch marker right where she left it, at the beginning of row three.

*Well, I'll be!* she thought chuckling to herself. *So that's what he was doing this morning instead of sleeping. It looks like we'll be going shopping for knitting supplies late,*" she continued in her mind as she got dressed.

About, forty five minutes later, both left their hotel room dressed in Intergalactic Karate championship gear. Both wore appropriate identification tags. Skonn wore a matching shoulder bag which held all of his karate gear.

"Skonn, you didn't eat a thing," Janice fussed.

"I consumed 24 grams of trail mix. I normally do not consume anything before a match except liquids," Skonn said.

"Nervous?"

"Exceptionally vigilant."

"You actually think the Shining Path would do something during the International Karate Championships? With all of these martial arts experts present?" Janice asked.

"Terrorists are not known for their logic, Janice," Skonn replied. "Their crazed minds are only focused on destruction and death. The more, the merrier."

"That's not a very comforting thought, Skonn."

"I am well aware of that, my love."

Janice flushed beneath her dark skin. "I do not like the odds."

When they arrived at the gate, they we're separated. Skonn was sent to the athletes' locker room while Janice was escorted to her seat, which was practically ring side.

*I like this seat, but, I don't know if I like being out in the open like this,* Janice thought. She was somewhat comforted by the fact that a delegation of Tellarites were seated behind her. However, she soon found herself less than overjoyed as they made her oh so unavoidably aware of their favorite pastime. She dropped her chin into both palms as she thought to herself, *Oh great, they're going to argue about food during the entire competition.*

\*\*\*\*\*

"Those bastards nearly killed your parents and family," Tony said after Captains Wekk and KTal left.

"Yes, they nearly did. Thank the God of the Universe that they did not," Shara replied.

"What the hell are the Shining Path people trying to accomplish, besides death and destruction?"

"Total galactic chaos," Shara replied. "If Vulcan secedes from the Federation, many of the rest of the Federation members will side with them. Others will most likely secede individually on their own, will bicker and squabble amongst themselves as they create their own fiefdoms, and will quite possibly cause a total collapse which could lead to interplanetary war. As for the Klingons and Romulans, there will be no more Neutral Zone."

"Aye Dios!" Tony exclaimed.

"The known universe as we know it will cease to exist in a manner of months," Shara said.

"I don't understand. Many of the Shining Path's members will die trying to achieve this demonic plan of theirs. You'd think they would want to live long enough to see the fruits of their labor," Tony said.

"There is an old Romulan saying, Tony. The fuse cares not who lights it, as long as there is a large and destructive explosion."

# Brain Benders

## ACROSS

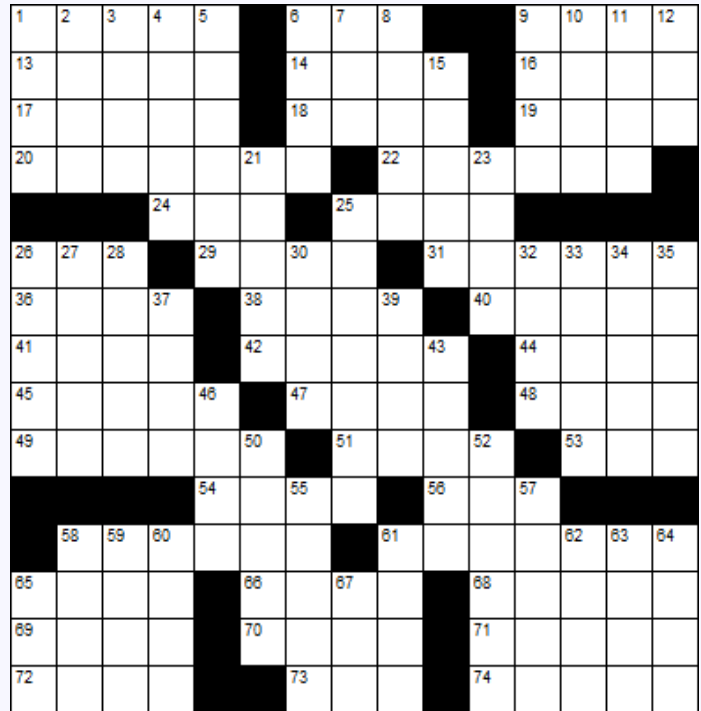
1. Impart knowledge
6. Statehouse V.I.P.
9. \*Farmer who befriended 20A
13. Mosey
14. Nile bird
16. Dash of panache
17. Air freshener option
18. Gentle rhythm
19. Provide temporarily
20. \*Inhuman companion of 61A
22. \*Human entrusted with the Terrigen crystals
24. Campaign pro
25. Farm building
26. Figured out
29. Surf sound
31. \*Head of the Genetic Council
36. Iris holder
38. Light gas
40. Forbidden
41. Drawn-out
42. Dead duck
44. Passing notice
45. Standoffish
47. Pew area
48. Comme ci, comme ca
49. \*Inhuman with hooves that can generate seismic waves
51. In-crowd transports
53. Half a score
54. Exploding star
56. Océano feeder
58. \*Inhuman with the power to survive in aquatic conditions
61. \*Teleporting companion of 20A
65. The Emerald Isle
66. Org. that listens for alien signals
68. Swedish currency
69. Pinball stopper
70. Sound rebound
71. Toil
72. \*Surfer who befriended 49A
73. "D'ye \_\_\_ John Peel": nineteenth century song
74. English exam finale, often
21. "\_\_\_ Came Jones": Coasters song
23. Part of CPU
25. \*Young Inhuman who has visions of the future
26. Soviet labor camp
27. Convex molding
28. Andrea Bocelli, for one
30. Interminable time
32. Kit Carson burial site
33. Prior's superior
34. Ear pollution
35. Climbed aboard
37. Intensely interested
39. Campbell of "Party of Five"
43. Prefix with "rocket"
46. Ariel or Calibri, e.g.
50. Western "necktie"
52. Soviet emblem tool
55. T-shirt style
57. Gumbo vegetables
58. The Fates, e.g.
59. Lunar trench
60. Keen on
61. Leo or Simba
62. Want ad listings
63. Small Indonesian water buffalo
64. Cautious
65. Biblical verb ending
67. Not just "a"



## DOWN

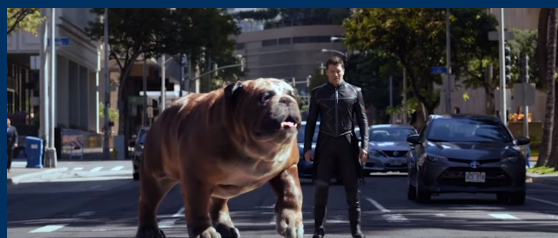
1. Mineral softer than gypsum
2. Kuwaiti ruler
3. In a competent manner
4. Grip tightly
5. "Iliad" hero
6. Quarter pint
7. Sapporo sash
8. Country home
9. Kosher \_\_\_
10. Pub pints
11. Windmill part
12. Windup
15. Marabou, for one

## ESB Crockett's Spirited Crossword Puzzle \*Those Who Aren't Exactly Human - Part 2 by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa - February 2018



## Answers to Previous Puzzle

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



# More Brain Benders

## SUDOKU PUZZLE

February 2018

Easy, Symmetrical

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to January's Sudoku Puzzle

Very Easy, Symmetrical

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

## WORD SEARCH

February's Topic: Ellen Woglom Roles

Look for 26 character names

by Brig. Gen. D. Tensa

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

Solution to January's Word Search:

Ken Leung Roles

S	H	O	P	K	E	E	P	E	R	M	G	B	F	L	
A	R	T	E	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	

# Brain Benders

## Word Search

### February's Word List:

Anna	Lily
April	Lona
Arryn	Lorraine
Becky	Louise
Brooke	Maddy Malone
Brynn	Maggie
Cara	Megan Shay
Heather	Mereta Sprows
Helen Fisher	Mereta Stockman
Jessica	Nicolette
Jordan Lucas	Nikki
Julie	Olivia
Kim Jacobi	Sunset Vixen 1



## KITTEN MIND MELD

My mind to your mind, my thoughts to your thoughts

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