



# Crockett's Spirit

*Impavidus Scribere Veritas — The Brave Write the Truth*



Volume 6 Issue 3

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## Fiction

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

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

by LTJG Star Eagle

AFTER A PLEASANTLY uneventful journey, Istrelle and Tyrstan found themselves standing in front of the Inn of the Stranded Sailor, accompanied by a blue sky filled with small white puffs of cloud.

Along the way, Istrelle had talked and Tyrstan had listened as they crossed the first ancient bridge to the small island of Vira, named for the alleged youngest of the first king's three daughters. This island, like the other two ahead, was nearly two miles across. It held a garrisoned keep and a small village that served as a harbor for the local fishermen. As they had passed broken-off pieces of the bridge that still stayed aloft, even with no visible means of support, she explained that the ancient sorcerer of fire who built the Grove and Havenshore also built these bridges, making them to withstand the degradation of the ages through the use of very powerful magicks. They had crossed three of the four bridges, each time handing over transit papers to the bridge guards. The next island they had come to was Mira, the second daughter. This island also contained a fortress, and its port served as the headquarters of the navy. Istrelle had remarked on how many more warships there seemed to be now than when she had been here before.

Then they had finally made their way to the island of Dira. This island, and the village that they were now standing in, was named after the eldest daughter. It was the lowest of the three islands and connected them via one final bridge to the great island of Elrian itself. This port catered to the needs of merchants and sailors from Sashiel and other far away

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## Fiction

### **The Alfore Encounter - 54**

#### **"Everyone Was Kung Fu Fighting"**

by CAPT Two Wolves

"You are awake very early, Jessica," Shara commented. She'd just nursed Victoria and had tucked her into the sling so she could nap. The colorful, handmade sling was a Godsend for Shara allowing her to keep Victoria close at hand, yet "Now about your second question." leaving her hands free to do other tasks

"Back home I have to wake up early to do chores before going to school." Jessica was seated next to Shara on the sofa. "I guess my body doesn't know that I'm in a starship heading to Vulcan at warp five." Continuing, she said, "I'd like to know more about the Track Cats, if you don't mind. How were they discovered? And why does Kiki have thumbs?"

Shara smiled. "Alfore legend states that a very long time ago, before they knew the cats existed, a seven-season aged girl child named Nyra was lost during one of their migrations. Since it was too close time of the great snows, it was essential that the tribe arrive at their underground lodging or the entire tribe would perish. Thus, the tribe could not afford to send out searchers to find Nyra, which was the harsh reality of ancient Alfore life. The grieving parents gave up hope of ever finding their daughter again. However, the next Spring, when the tribe had emerged from their winter sanctuary, Nyra had returned safe and was waiting for them," Shara related.

"How did she survive in such a harsh environment?" Jessica asked.

"A large pride of Track Cats had found Nyra, taken her to safety and cared for her throughout the stormy winter season. During that time, she noted they were telepathic and friendly. When the storms were over and the harsh weather had abated, the entire Track Cat pride took Nyra back her tribe. She then told the elders that the cats were friendly, telepathic, and were excellent trackers, which explains how they found the tribe. This led to a close relationship between the Alfore people and the Track Cats."

"Wow! That's a great story!" Jessica said.

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places. The plaza housing the taverns and shops, the sounds of the gulls and people milling about carrying on with their daily business, the smells of the ocean—and the sewers—all carried Istrelle back to a past filled with bittersweet memories. She remembered her life in the city, all of its smells and tastes and curiosities—all that was good about life in a place full of many different peoples. She also remembered her life as a prostitute, trying to find meaning amidst all the emptiness and shallowness of men's behaviors.

"Are we ready to go in yet?" asked Tyrstan innocently, pulling Istrelle away from her thoughts. He was his human self again, having changed in a stable that they had rented for the day. Only their saddlebags and other riding gear lay in the stable now.

"Yes—sorry," she responded. "I've been here once before, the last time I made the monthly errand run. It's relatively safe here," she finished, feeling the bracelet around her left wrist. She'd had it enchanted to protect her from the untoward advances of any stranger.

Do you think they'll remember you?" he queried, smiling. "Maybe we can get a discount."

"I doubt either one, Tyrstan," was her response. She looked down toward the port, then up at the sky. "It's late afternoon. We should have some time to bathe and rest before people start coming in for the night." She headed for the doorway, Tyrstan following.

The inn's tavern greeted them with the typical smells of ale, roasted meats and the smoke of various pipe tobaccos. A counter lay to their right, leading to the door of the kitchen. Stairs to the inn were to their left, against a rough plank wall. The rest of the tavern housed dining tables as well as chairs that encircled a great hearth at the end of the room. It gave some light to the otherwise dimly lit tavern, since the open doorway and two small windows in the front could only give what light they could from the rays of the afternoon sun. A single plank door separated the hearth from the kitchen wall, along the back wall.

While a handful of men sat among the chairs, pipes and mugs of ale in their hands as they conversed, a barmaid wiped down the tables. An olive-complected man stood behind the counter, smiling as Istrelle and Tyrstan entered. He motioned for them to come to him, and they did. Istrelle took the bag of coins and opened it as she approached the barkeep, expecting him to ask for money right away.

"Seagood," she said, the common greeting around here that long ago originated from the words "May the sea be good to you."

He surprised her with "So, you are back again! And now, with your..." in a thick accent.

"With my cousin," she smiled. Tyrstan stayed back just a couple steps as she continued. "I am surprised you remember me. I've only been here once before—but thank you. And your name is Ydario,

right?" she finished.

The barkeep beamed. "Yes, my dear lady! Oh, you are the bright light in my day today!"

The barmaid rolled her eyes.

The barkeep's visage turned a bit more serious. "So how can my wife and I be of service to you?"

"We need a room for the next two nights—and a bath," Istrelle answered in a pleasant tone.

"And food!" piped up Tyrstan.

"And food," she replied, glaring to her side but still smiling.

"Just one room?" asked Ydario.

"One should be fine; we're family," answered Istrelle. For the first time in who knew how long, she felt that what she'd just said was closer to the truth than she'd realized. "And just how much will this cost?" she asked.

"An anchor and a seahorse—or a hundred and twenty pence, whatever you've got," he answered.

Istrelle's eyes widened. "Only last month it was eighty pence!" she countered.

"Yes, that is true," began the barkeep, "but there are two of you instead of one. And, unfortunately, I have finally had to raise my price since we see fewer visitors from afar--"

"Or at all, for that matter," finished his wife, putting her rag in her bucket and then heading toward the kitchen. She glared at the men around the hearth as she left, mumbling something as to "Cheapskate lazy old pricks."

Istrelle pulled out the coins. As Elzivreth had said, there were chicks, hens, cocks, lambs, ewes, rams and a couple sows. Noticing them, she then realized that these were all coins from the mainland; not a single sea-coin was in the bunch. They were all also very bright, as if they had been recently minted or hardly used. It then occurred to her how odd this was, as sea-coins were just as common where she lived as they were around here. Why would Elzivreth be saving all these land-coins? More importantly, how was she obtaining them? Who would be giving the matron newly-minted imperial coins?

"How about a ram, three ewes and a lamb?" she offered.

Ydario looked a bit surprised. "Landers,' eh? You must be from farther north than I thought. No matter; all imperial coin is good to me," he answered her, slowly holding out his hand so she could pay him. She added an extra lamb for his friendliness.

He smiled. "Supper is after the sailors come in—usually between seven and eight o'clock." He reached under the counter and pulled out a key, which he then gave to her. "Your room is the second one you'll come to. We already have water boiling, so Esmera can draw you both a bath forthwith."

Tyrstan kept looking around, breathing everything in. His senses were more finely attuned because of his feral nature, letting him keep track of two flies that were fighting in the back of the tavern, all the while taking in the scents of dozens of customers both past and present. Finally, he looked at

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the barkeep. "How did you come up with the name?" he asked.

Ydario smiled again. "Many years ago I sailed these waters, from my home city of F'rin. We encountered a fierce squall, and my ship was lost. I stayed afloat on wreckage for many days until I ended up at these shores"--he pointed at the doorway, to the harbor below--"just over there. A maiden took pity on me and took me in"--he then pointed the opposite direction, toward the kitchen--"and I fell in love with her, so I decided to stay. We saved our coins and purchased this inn. That, my friend, is how the Inn of the Stranded Sailor"--he raised both hands in the air, looking up--"came to be."

"So you are from the west?" began Istrelle. "Have you been back there? Have you heard any news from those lands?" she questioned.

He looked back at her and lowered his arms, his smile disappearing. "My lady, I could tell you many things about my homeland. And perhaps I will--later. Now, I must ready supper. And I believe your bath is ready," he finished.

Esmera came out from the kitchen. "Who wants it first? The bathing room is there," she said, motioning to the back door.

Tyrstan looked at Istrelle. "You go first," he said.

Satchel in hand, Istrelle made her way to the door at the back of the room.

Tyrstan headed for the front door.

"Where are you going?" demanded the barmaid.

"Uh, to check on the horses," he replied. He didn't feel like explaining that he didn't like staying inside when he could be outside instead...anywhere.

He meandered along the street until he could find a way down to the shore. Tyrstan loved the ocean as much as anyone else in the Grove, including Delendra--maybe even more. Even if there wasn't much of a beach here along the village, he figured he could at least get his feet wet. He had never grown up around anything larger than a lake; the Feral Lands were about as landlocked as any kingdom could be. That's why the thought of limitless water (in his mind) called to him. The feeling of being surrounded by an entire ocean of water appealed to him the most. He often daydreamed about diving to the deepest regions of the ocean, being the first to discover untold kinds of whales, fish and other mysteries of the abyss. He also fantasized about finding some lost civilization that had either been above sea level at one point but then disappeared, or maybe some underwater city where the aquatic denizens enjoyed their privacy.

He was now under the docks, shoes off and feet in the water. It was cold but not unbearable.

He moved over a bit to an empty berth where he could also enjoy the sun. That's where he first smelled and then saw something unusual. A man in his forties was walking down the steps with a sack in his hand. The sack was wriggling. Then Tyrstan heard the sounds.

It was a bag of kittens.

Rage and the urge to act immediately filled his

mind. He hated men like this or anyone for that matter who would do such a terrible thing as to kill a bunch of innocent animals.

He neither saw nor smelled anybody else who could see what he was about to do. He first thought of turning into a bear to scare the man away. For once in his life, however, he also thought of the consequences of this action further down the road. If he morphed into a bear, he would destroy his clothes. He was sure that the village would arrest him on his way back to the tavern if he was completely naked.

He thought for a few seconds as the man kept walking down the stairs, bag in hand. Tyrstan had never actually seen a demon, but he'd heard many a story about them and their feral looks. He had seen rams, snakes and wolves before. He gave himself the horns of the ram, the eyes of the snake, and the teeth of the wolf. Finally, since he had seen plenty of blood, he made his snake eyes blood red. Tyrstan's form was indeed a visage from the deepest and darkest of all the hells.

He strode to the man who now saw him and froze in absolute terror.

"Give me those kittens!" ordered Tyrstan in the gruffest, most commanding voice he could muster.

The poor man pissed himself as he gave the sack to Tyrstan. He was shaking so hard he almost dropped it. Tyrstan's reflexes compensated for the man's terror though, and he now had the kittens safely in his own hand.

"Now go home!" he ordered the man again.

The man turned around and promptly ran back up the stairs.

"And never try that again!" was the last thing Tyrstan told him.

Tyrstan ran with sack in hand back under the docks. Still in his demonic form, he opened the bag. He knew the kittens wouldn't care what he looked like, just what he did.

The sack was full of five little meowing kittens who were terrified in their own right. He very gently pulled each one out and examined them, putting each up to his cheek. He quietly soothed it as he held the kitten in one hand and pet it with the other.

The first one he picked up was a male with light gray fur and black stripes. The second was a storm-cloud gray, also a male. The third kitten was entirely black. He meowed the loudest with a high-pitched little squeak. The fourth kitten was a female who bore black and white splotches that made Tyrstan think of a cow. He chuckled as he gently nuzzled her. The last kitten, another male, was a golden tan on his top and white on his belly.

Tyrstan told them they were safe now. He was able to calm them down a bit since he knew how to communicate with any animal. He placed a vision of being safe and warm in their minds by uttering a sound to carry that vision. It was far easier if he could look the animal in the eyes, as he did in this case.

They communicated back to him as well. They

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they were hungry and that they couldn't smell their mother, who had always been with them up to this point. They were confused why the man who had taken care of their mother had placed them in the sack.

Tyrstan assured them that he would take them back to their mother. He knew that she couldn't be too far away. He asked them to describe where they lived, and they showed him visions of what appeared to him to be a warehouse of some kind. They showed him images of other grown cats being there as well, hunting rats and mice and other vermin. Tyrstan surmised that the man had decided there were already enough mousers to keep the pest population down.

He then realized what he still looked like, so he turned back into his human form. Leaving the kittens in the open sack on the shore, he quickly put his shoes back on.

Tyrstan then sniffed the kittens. He could smell each scent as well as their mother's scent. He also picked up the man's scent. He made sure all the kittens were in the sack and then he picked it up, assuring the little ones they were safe. Then he walked to the stairs where the man had pissed himself. He was glad that the man had done this actually, because it made tracking his whereabouts all that much easier.

He made his way back up to the street, hoping that the man's warehouse and his home—where Tyrstan had told him to return—were near one another. He followed the urine trail as far as it could lead him, which was indeed to the warehouse district. The urine trail finally disappeared, but he did catch an older scent of the man in this area.

Continually sniffing the air and ground for scents, he was able to finally find the warehouse that the kittens had shown him. As he entered the building, he was met by a hired hand, a young man with a reddish beard and short blonde hair.

"I don't know you," he started. "What's your business here?" he demanded, putting his hand to his scabbard.

"I'm not makin' any trouble," began Tyrstan. "I'm just bringin' these kittens back to their mama. I found 'em on the shore," he explained, the wriggling bag of kittens slung over his left shoulder.

The young man frowned. "How in the hells would you know where they came from?" he demanded again.

Tyrstan had no explanation this man would believe. "Fuck it," he stated, giving the bearded man a fast right cross to his left jaw. He promptly fell to the ground, thoroughly knocked out.

Tyrstan looked through the warehouse as quickly as he could, making sure that no one else would see what he was up to. Of course, the sack of high-pitched meows didn't make things easier. Before long, however, he could hear the distraught sounds of their mama, and he found her in a corner where she had made a den for herself and her little ones.

When she saw Tyrstan and realized he had her babies, she hissed at him. "You threaten my children!" was the gist of the hiss.

Tyrstan purred back. "I have your children," he assured her, lowering the sack and opening it for her.

She emitted a low growl at him, but he meowed back to her "They are safe and inside the sack. They need you," he finished. She immediately went inside, cautiously, but then quite happily as the kittens each came up to greet her and to nurse. She licked them as they fed. He opened it up more for her and her babies so he could see them all.

"You and your babies are not safe here," Tyrstan told her after a few moments. "If you stay here," he meowed to her, "your babies will be taken from you again. You must find a new home." He placed in her mind some area in the woods and tall grass where few people traveled.

"I don't know any place like that," she replied.

"I will find a safe place for you and your babies," he promised her. "If you all stay in the sack, I will carry you."

Mama cat did as Tyrstan asked, remaining in the center of the sack, surrounded by her babies, as he pulled the sack back up and over them. As he gently and slowly lifted the sack and placed it over his left shoulder again, he changed his face and hair into that of the young bearded man.

They made their way to the front of the warehouse. As he passed the young man at the front, still unconscious, Tyrstan simply murmured "Sorry."

It took him half an hour to find a spot that neither smelled of people nor natural predators. He could also detect signs of voles and field mice, an ample supply of food for Mama and her babies.

He lowered the sack to the ground and opened it, letting all of them come out so they could finally experience their new home. He then picked up each kitten, wished them well and then said his goodbyes.

When he picked up Mama to tell her the same, she purred and brushed her left cheek against his. It was her way of expressing love and gratitude. Tyrstan smiled and turned a bit red. He gently set her down and then headed back to the tavern.

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Istrelle, in her room, was surprised to hear a knock at the door. "Yes?" she asked.

Tyrstan entered.

"Where have you been?" she asked him, putting her clothes into a dresser.

"Oh, nowhere really," he said, smiling weakly.

"Well, I bet your bath water's not very warm by now," she chided him.

"Oh yeah, a bath," he suddenly remembered.

Istrelle stopped what she was doing; Tyrstan was quieter than normal, she noticed.

"Is everything alright?" she asked.

"Yeah! All's good!" he assured her.

"Then get yourself a bath," she ordered, smiling and resuming what she'd been doing.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Tyrstan, turning around while smiling to himself. He headed back down the stairs to finally take that bath.

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"For the sake of time, I only related the encapsulated version. There are a good many detailed historical volumes on the subject in Ido's library back on Alfore," Shara told her.

"I'm going to go there one day and read all of them myself," Jessica vowed passionately.

"You absolutely should," Shara encouraged her knowing Jessica had a long list of things that she was determined to do.

Shara telepathically called Kiki to her. Kiki stretched and came to Shara on silent paws, sat in front of her and put her left paw in her hand.

"Now about your second question. Approximately 35% of the Track Cat population are polydactyl which means they have extra toes," Shara explained, tilting Kiki's paw in her hand to show Jessica. Kiki indeed had a "thumb" toe on her front paw. Kiki put up her other paw to show Jessica.

"In the Alfore language, these are called Mikkim or Mitten Paws. When the female has Mikkim, she will throw or bear kits that also have them. It is a trait that passed down only through the matriarchal line," Shara continued. "And because of this extra toe, the Track Cats are very dexterous and able to use their paws like hands. An extra asset for their species."

"Awesome! That means they can open doors and stuff? Boy, they are really smart and helpful cats! I'm glad I've met Kiki and Rusty and the kits! I love them!" Jessica said as she bent down, hugged Kiki around neck and kissed her head.

"I am hungry. Would you like to have some breakfast?" Shara asked, as she stood.

"Yes, I would," Jessica replied, as she followed Shara into the VIP quarters kitchen area.

\* \* \* \* \*

Skonn was first up in the line for the demonstration bout. Janice watched with fascination as he bowed to the four judges then took his stance. The stadium was packed but one could hear a pin drop as everyone watched. Even the normally boisterous Tellarites were quiet.

The signal was given and Skonn went through his katas one by one in perfect order. When he finished, the audience applauded. Skonn again bowed to the judges and stepped off the platform.

The announcement was made for team kata demonstration and Skonn returned with his team, a female Vulcan and a male Klingon. Both, had the same high belt-ranking as Skonn. As one, they bowed to the judges, then took their places and waited for the signal to start.

The signal was given and the team did their katas in perfect unison. The audience roared with approval when they finished. However that was just the first phase. They second phase was the mock combat phase. Janice watched with utter fascination as they sparred.

They were about to finish when one of the Tellarites sitting behind Janice squealed a curse and struck her over the head with a blunt object just enough to stun

her slightly. As her head reeled, a mêlée ensued between the Tellarites and some unknown foes. Seconds later Skonn and his team mates were in the stands generously administering karate chops and neck pinches where needed.

Five minutes later, the assailants were carted off by Intergalactic Karate Championship security. Janice was whisked off to the medical center where her head was examined for injuries. It was determined by the Azo doctor that she merely had a nasty bump on her head. She was given a towel-wrapped ice pack for the swelling and a hypo spray of pain reliever.

Just as Janice's drama had ended, in trooped some very familiar people. Her command staff lead by Dr. Savage.

"What... what are you doing here? You're supposed to be on extended leave," Janice said.

"It looks like I can't leave you for a minute, when I do, you wind up in sick bay," Savage stated. He then took one look at Skonn and Janice, frowned and started laughing.

*What does he consider so humorous?* Skonn queried of Janice mentally.

*He knows,* Jancie replied.

*He knows what?* Skonn asked.

**SKONN!** Janice shouted mentally, causing Skonn to visibly wince and blink.

*Oh that. Please do not do that again,* Skonn responded.

*Why not?*

*It is giving me a headache.*

*Sorry.*

Just then, Captain Gos trooped in with his deputies.

"You two again? It seems are you always in trouble," Gos said. He looked around and noticed Janice's command staff standing around watching the scene. "Who are these people?" He demanded. Janice introduced everyone.

"What do you mean they are always in trouble?" Doctor Savage asked.

"There were two previous incidents," Gos replied.

"Two previous incidents?" Standing Bear asked.

"I'll explain later. Right now, we've got to get back to the competition," Janice interjected.

"Oh no you don't! You're coming to the station house to be interviewed," Gos countered.

"We're going too," Kesha said.

"As long as you don't interfere with my criminal investigation," Gos said. The group followed him outside where multiple air cars were waiting to transport them to the police station.

Upon arrival ten minutes later, they were greeted with pandemonium. Apparently, the entire group of Tellarites had been brought in to give eye witness testimony. The usually loud and boisterous Tellatites were even more so.

Captain Gos bellowed for them to quiet down, ushered Janice and her crew into his office and slammed the door. Janice could tell, even though Gos' office was sound proof, the noise started up again.

*This is going to be a long day,* Janice groused via her marital link.

*Agreed,* Skonn replied in kind.

# Fiction

## Star Wars - Ashi's Shame

### Ch. 19: The Lightsaber

by LT Ashinaga

Sorkonia basked in the deep orange glow of the sunset as the evening turned to night. Stars twinkled into view one by one. A cooler breeze washed through town announcing the approach of autumn. Even the warmly dressed Jahalans were heading inside.

Ashi sat in the large room Askos had provided. There was a sizable, soft bed. A sunken living room, and a huge stone hearth. The room itself was hewn in solid rock with a balcony overlooking the mountains. The cold floors were warmed by large, fluffy mats made from the skins of the yoro, a herd animal raised for meat, milk, and skins.

A hearty fire crackled in the fireplace while Ashi sat on the floor in his meditation pose. He'd had few opportunities to meditate like this for some time. He delved into the force for answers. The current situation plagued him, he had to save his people but he didn't want to be a prisoner of the Empire. Getting in synch with the force would help him understand his path.

In his mind, he could see the candle burning, its flicker dancing to the tune of the crackling fire nearby. The force in the area became visible in a way only a Jedi could see. He wanted to touch the future, see it so he could make the right choice. It wasn't easy for a Jedi to use the force to foresee events. If the force wasn't willing to tell the future, it would be impossible. If a vision came, the mind of a weaker Jedi might not be strong enough to see it clearly. Ashi worried he wasn't strong enough to control this.

Suddenly the pleasant scent of wood smoke turned into the horrid stench of burnt flesh. The darkness around the candle melted away and he was surrounded by the images at the temple. Standing before him was a cloaked figure. Not the man who killed the younglings, but the Sith who has been following him on this journey.

"Show your face!" Ashi demanded.

The Sith laughed and whispered, "They're all going to die because of you. Just like before."

Ashi screamed, in his mind, "No! I won't allow it!"

"Run, little coward, run."

Ashi stood his ground. "I'll not run away. Never again."

"Keep running, little coward, or I'll catch you. I will kill you." The Sith pulled out a lightsaber and turned it on, its red blade pointed at Ashi's face. "It is your destiny." He lifted the blade and prepared to cut Ashi apart.

Ashi broke free of the vision and opened his eyes. He had to gather himself for a moment as he realized he was still sitting in the room.

Roh appeared before him. "My padawan, what troubles you so?"

Ashi took a deep breath and calmed himself again. "I have no choice."

Roh cocked his head. "No choice?"

"The Empire is coming, the Sith lord will be here to kill me. I must face him. If I don't, they will destroy my people."

"Destiny is a funny thing," Roh mused, "We often meet it on the road we choose to avoid it. The road you chose has led you here. If you're truly ready to face this, you must finish your trials."

"Finish? I haven't started them yet?"

Roh was rather amused, "Haven't you? There are nine trials each Jedi must face before he can be called a knight. Teamwork was your first trial. Trusting in your own abilities is vital to being a good Jedi but having too much trust is dangerous. For ten years you have worked with your people for their benefit. You've never allowed yourself to be arrogant in your abilities. You understand teamwork like a Jedi master."

"Really?"

Roh nodded, "Yes. Isolation is the second trial, all the Jedi who escaped the purge have faced severe isolation, you have done so with great wisdom and strength. You have held to your values and teachings and become a much stronger Jedi for it. Anger is the third trial. You faced your anger back in the forest when you allowed yourself to re-live your escape from the temple. The anger you felt toward yourself was invalid and you allowed yourself to accept the truth and forgive your own actions. Have you not felt this to be true?"

Ashi thought about that. "Yes. I didn't realize it, but I have accepted my past and forgiven it. I have felt stronger."

"See, my young padawan. You defeated your own anger." Roh continued, "betrayal is the fourth trial. It may be one of the hardest for any Jedi to face. You faced it at the port when one of your own betrayed you."

Ashi asked, "How have I fulfilled that test?"

"Because, you've not lingered on it. You've not let that man's betrayal of you darken your heart. Have you not allowed yourself to understand why he did what he did?"

"Yes," Ashi nodded, "I guess I did understand. I was hurt, but I didn't honestly blame him for doing anything to save his child."

"Focus is the fifth test. I have witnessed your focus since the day you arrived here. You have great, powerful focus in the force. The sixth test is instinct. You demonstrate instinct often, but no more than the moment you realized the path to the

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city and took it. You let the instinct of your training guide you and not let your feelings cloud judgment. The seventh test is forgiveness. I must say that you have honored that test in the greatest way I have seen since I became a padawan myself."

Ashi realized what Roh was speaking about, "Grask."

"Yes. A heart of forgiveness is a whole heart indeed. You had no reason to help him, but you allowed wisdom and logic to guide you as you sought understanding. Once you listened to his story and accepted his apology, you were able to forgive. Not only that, but you helped your people forgive him, and gave him the gift of forgiving himself." Roh beamed with pride. He continued "The eighth test is that of protection. For ten years you have protected your people at the risk of your own life. You passed that test years ago."

With a gulp Ashi asked, "The last is fear, isn't it?"

Roh nodded, "Yes. Fear is the most difficult test of them all. We all face this test and many fail it."

Ashi hesitantly asked, "Have I passed that test yet, master?"

"No. You must face your fear." Roh's tone became grim. "You must face the dark side of the force, or you will never be fully prepared for what is ahead."

Ashi asked, "What do I do?"

"Tomorrow morning, you will leave the city and let the force guide you to the final test. Tonight, you must construct your lightsaber so as to be ready for the test. But, first, you have a guest." Roh looked toward the door just as a timid knock came.

Ash looked up to the door leading directly to the room next to his. "You may open the door."

There Grask stood, with a rather pitiful look on his face. "May I come in?"

Ashi nodded and stood up, "Please. What's wrong?"

Grask came in slowly and then sat in front of the fire. He was closer to the flames than Ashi would want to sit, but he needed the heat. "I'm feeling very alone right now."

"I can understand."

Grask stared at the ground, "I lied."

Ashi came over and sat nearer to him "About what?"

"I said that I took the job offer from Drak because I needed the money. Honestly, I did need money to get home, but I could've found honest work. I took the job because I was having a hard time missing my brother. Being around other mercenaries made me feel like he was there."

"I respect that," Ashi said, "I lost many close friends when the Jedi were killed. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't wish to see them again."

"I'm not a mercenary, not like Grenor was," Grask said, "But, he and I spent a lot of time together. Most of my childhood was around the mercenar-

ies who worked with Grenor." Grask picked at the long fur on the carpet under him. "I know what you're thinking. Mercenaries are evil murderers. My brother was a monster, that's what you're thinking. He wasn't."

"Honestly," Ashi replied, "I learned not to judge a person without knowing them."

"My brother worked for a reputable organization of the Trandoshan's. He was a high ranking member of the Solar Hunters. Worlds in the Outer Rim would hire them to help defend their borders or fight off raiders and other bad people. I was proud of his work. I watched him defend those who couldn't defend themselves. People in the galaxy think that all Trandoshans are mean, dumb hunters who kill for sport. We aren't. We like to hunt, and we are trained to kill from birth. But, our skills can be used for good as much as evil. After I learned what Drak was doing, I was horrified. Grenor would never work with such filth, no matter how much they offered."

Ashi smiled. "Your brother would be proud of your actions today. I'm sorry that you fear your own people won't understand."

"They won't," Grask quietly replied, "But I wouldn't change what I did today. I just wish I had killed Drak as well. He's now going to hurt your people."

Ashi shook his head, "Drak's end will come. It may not be by your hand or mine, but I'm sure it will come. Don't linger on what could've been, you can't change that."

Grask actually smiled. "That makes sense." The smile faded, "Tell me, Ashi, why have you been so nice to me? Most people don't trust Trandoshan's. You were never mean to me or distrusted me. I still cannot understand why."

"You saved my life. I was willing to go with your companion and give up my life to atone for my own mistakes. I knew that going with him meant my death, and I didn't see a way out. You saved me. For that, I owed you the chance to prove your honor."

Grask bowed his head to Ashi, "Thank you. I was so scared of what your people would do to me. I never thought anyone would be nice to me."

Ashi looked at the scales of this Trandoshan and realized something. "Tell me, how old are you?"

Grask thought for a second, "In Imperial Galactic years I am eighteen."

"So young," Ashi commented.

Grask answered, "Not really. My people only live normally for forty or fifty Imperial years. How long do Jahalans live?"

"We can live for up to one hundred and fifty Imperial Years. Some have even lived two hundred," Ashi answered.

"Wow." Grask's eyes were wide. "May I ask you another question?"

"Yes."

*(Continued on page 8)*

(Continued from Page 7)

“Why does a Jedi not have a lightsaber? Do you hide it to keep yourself concealed?”

Ashi laughed. “Actually, I’ve never had a lightsaber.” Before Grask could ask he added, “It’s a long, and boring story. But, now I’m going to construct my first one, so I can face what is ahead.”

Grask contained his youthful eagerness. “May I watch you build it? I’ve always wondered how they work. Or, is that forbidden?”

“You can watch.” Ashi got up and walked over to the bed. “Curiosity is a wonderful gift. A lightsaber is a very powerful and unique tool that is hard to construct. One must have all of the proper parts gathered, or it is impossible. You cannot replicate a lightsaber with fake pieces.” He returned to the middle of the room with the small box he had retrieved from the shuttle before setting out on this quest.

Grask got up and came over to watch. “What is it?”

Ashi opened it and pulled out the components to a lightsaber. “Ten years ago, my master was cut down by Darth Vader, on the day of the Jedi massacre. I took his broken lightsaber with me in hopes of being able to rebuild it for myself. But, the kyber crystal inside it was broken in the fight. Now I have a replacement for the crystal and can use these parts to build a new saber of my own.”

Grask slowly scooted closer as he looked at all the parts. “It looks so simple. What part do you start with?”

Ashi pulled the components out and laid them on the floor. He then pulled out the blue sapphire and set it down amongst them. There was a long pause as Ashi looked at the parts. “I...I don’t know. I never got this far before.”

Grask picked up a section of the handle. “I can try to help. I learned how to repair my brother’s guns when they broke. I’m not a great engineer, but for an artist, I know my way around weapons decently. If we had the saber that Drak bought, that would help.”

Ashi gently took the part out of Grask’s hand. “It’s not that simple. Building a lightsaber requires one attuned with the force, only using the force can you build it so that it will work. Just putting it together won’t accomplish anything. But...I don’t know how.”

Roh appeared, seated on the floor before Ashi. “The first step to education is asking the right question.”

Ashi looked up and then bowed his head, “Master, tell me what I must do?”

Grask asked, “Why did you call me master? I don’t know what to do?”

Roh laughed, Ashi answered, “I’m sorry. It would take too much to explain to you, but I am speaking with my former master. He is in the force and is communicating me. You may stay and watch, but I must ask you to be silent.”

Grask glanced around for a second and then sat back and smiled.

Roh mused, “Your friend is weak in the force, but his spirit is one of kindness.”

“I agree. Now, please tell me what I must do next?”

“Meditate on the force, focus your mind on the crystal core and all the elements around it. Let its construction be guided by the force and your own will.”

Ashi asked, “Master, the parts for this saber are broken.”

“Use the force, it will fix what is broken and provide something new. Trust in it.”

Ashi put one hand up and focused his mind on the force. One by one the parts of this broken lightsaber lifted into the air, the sapphire at the center. Grask leaned a little closer, transfixed by the hovering cloud of metal. Two pieces fitted together, then another, and another. It was slowly coming together. Suddenly, it hit the ground and the parts fell away from each other.

Ashi opened his eyes and frowned, “What am I doing wrong?”

“Nothing, young padawan. Your focus was correct, it just takes some time. Don’t press yourself to be quick, it must flow naturally.”

Ashi attained his position again and lifted the components into the air. Once again it failed to come together. This time, he merely let it fall and lifted it again.

An hour passed and the novelty of watching this gave way to tiredness for Grask. He excused himself and went to bed. Ashi continued to work, undaunted by sleepiness.

## Solution to February’s Crossword Puzzle

### Inhumans - Part 2

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

# More Brain Benders

## SUDOKU PUZZLE

March 2018  
Medium, 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 February's Sudoku Puzzle

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

March's Topic: Clark Gregg Roles  
Look for 29 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 February's Word Search:

Ellen Woglom Roles

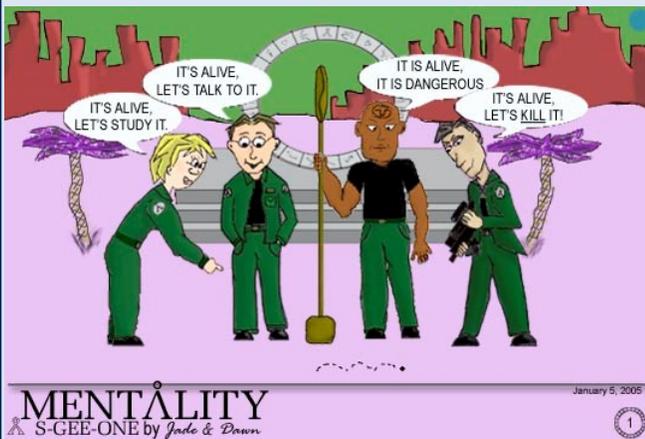
S	H	O	P	K	E	E	P	E	R	M	G	B	F	L	
A	R	T	E	E	D	I	T	O	R	I	N	X	G	G	C
S	H	E	N	Y	U	A	N	K	O	Q	O	N	E	E	
K	P	R	G	R	H	J	N	W	E	K	O	N	L	L	
K	A	R	N	A	K	H	N	C	J	W	E	J	L	I	
I	L	E	U	T	O	E	I	S	M	G	T	X	O	U	
D	D	N	W	J	H	L	I	A	M	L	I	U	Y	T	
O	O	C	K	P	E	I	S	N	Q	G	L	G	D	S	
M	N	E	E	I	U	W	V	G	N	L	N	I	B	U	
E	O	T	N	W	I	L	L	I	E	I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

### March's Word List:

Agent Coulson	Marty
Bill	Mercer
Cam	Miller
Dave	Mr. Hadfield
Dr. Mekel	Mr. Markovic
Eason Jordan	Muckle
Edward	Nanny Bot 1
FBI Sniper	Nanny Bot 2
Gerald	Nat Jones
Hank	Paul
Harvey	Randy
Henrietta	Steckle
Henry	Supernerd
Howard	Vance
Leonato	



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