

Consuming Darkness
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Competition: [HSD] Discovery - Another Nexus

Introduction

This fiction takes place after *Denizens of The Desert*. I recommend reading the first submission then this one. Thank you.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Gb_Qn9AeJ55tIt JsNMhmYIWqr1iAolCAW2NY4spTFs/edit?usp=sharing.

Chapter 1

Two Weeks After "Denizens of the Desert"

Research Outpost, Ambria

"What do you mean I'm stuck here until the next shuttle?" Jinius demanded. He rose from his chair slamming his palms against the smooth oak desk.

The officer took a step back. He rubbed his hands together nervously. "I'm sorry, Sir. The directive said that we cannot spare any more individuals. The ever-growing situation with the Collective has stretched resources thin. That is what I was told."

Jinius dropped back against the chair exasperated tossing his arms up frustrated. What was he to do? He had enough gauze and bandages wrapped around his thigh to tie up a krayt dragon. The damn leg hurt like it was going to fall off, and he still didn't have feeling in half his toes. The blaster shot he'd taken had torn him up something awful.

"I'm sorry," Jinius said quietly. He was frustrated. He'd already been stuck on this rock for too long. He'd much rather be back at the Shadow Academy. "I shouldn't yell at you for doing your job. I appreciate you making the trip, Lieutenant."

The Lieutenant gave Jinius a confused look. He clearly wasn't used to being treated so kindly by Dark Jedi. "Thank... Thank you, Acolyte."

Jinius smiled at him, "It's Hunter now." Jinius held up a datapad off his desk and waved it in the air. "Apparently, this mission earned my stripes, so to speak."

"Then I would say congratulations are in order, *Hunter Griffin*." The Lieutenant gave Jinius a quiet bow.

The officer left the room off to his other assignments. Fortunately for Jinius, he'd been assigned an office within the outpost. He wasn't particularly used to having an office. Most of his work thus far had been done in communal research labs. Here he wasn't the researcher; he was the supervisor.

Jinius sat quietly for a moment absently rubbing his thigh. The rubbing helped, a little. The confounded medical droids said that it probably irritated the wound. In any case, the rubbing did help relieve of the pain. Pain. Pain was the real challenge. Narcotics would cut into it but they made him feel loopy and uncoordinated. And bacta, the universal cure-all, wasn't getting anywhere near him. Jinius would balloon up and break out in hives the moment the bacta touched his skin.

A heavy series of knocks came from his door. He pressed the button on the console to let whoever it was in.

"Yo! Boss!" came the gravelly voice of Addenson, the pilot he'd been assigned for his stay. She poked her head into the room. The older woman had mostly gray hair was pulled back into a messy ponytail that seemed to bring attention to the smile lines accenting her lips and eyes. "Bunch of them airhead science-types want to go investigate that damned lake where I found your sorry butt fighting those hellish lizards. They won't shut up about it. Should I take them up that way? Twenty credits says the one with glasses gets eaten within the first 15 minutes."

"The one with glasses?" Jinius asked quietly. "Half of them have glasses."

"Easy credits, Pretty Boy." Addenson smiled.

Addenson always had a way about her. Jinius had never met a pilot quite like her and with every passing day he was a little more impressed by her. Not only was the older woman a crack pilot but she was kind of fun to be around. If nothing else she made his day more interesting.

"What reason do they possibly have to go down to that Force-forsaken lake? Its crawling with hssiss?" Jinius asked getting back to the discussion. The researchers were becoming intolerable.

"Beats the hell out of me, Boss-man," Addenson said back. She'd moved into the room and taken a seat in one of Jinius' guest chairs.

Normally he'd invite someone to sit before they would do so. Not Addenson, she didn't give to fracks either way. Either did Jinius, for that matter. Addenson then kicked her boots up on the table. That shocked Jinius. Piles of dust formed on the desk around the woman's boots. He cared about that a little more.

"Nerds said something about wanting to investigate the Nexus there? I don't really know what they are on about. They seem damned intent on going."

Jinius laughed a little. "You're going to need to give me a little more than that." He leaned back in his chair.

"Beats me. Said something about a nexus or some nonsense. It's that mystical mumbo jumbo you Force types are all about."

It finally dawned on Jinius. The solution to his situation was staring him in the face. He stood up at his realization. He'd been so consumed with his injured leg and all the goings on around the outpost that he had completely forgotten what the researchers were here to investigate: The Force Nexus. Ignoring Addenson who was actively loosening yet more dust off her boots, Jinius turned his chair to face his computer terminal. He'd read briefly about Force Nexuses in his Shadow

Academy studies. They were incredibly rare and immensely powerful -- the kind of thing that Sith Lords loved to get their hands on.

Jinius turned to do some research sitting back in his chair. He completely forgot Addenson was in the room. She drifted off to sleep allowing her gravely snores to become the background track to Jinius' research. A few minutes later Jinius stood up, nearly collapsed on his bad leg he'd forgotten about, and headed towards the door. He had a plan.

"Get up, Ellanna. I'm denying their request and going myself. I have an idea." Jinius grabbed his cloak and headed out of the room.

Addenson stumbled out of her chair jumping up, her hand dropping from her side to her blaster from Jinius sudden movement and started to follow. "What? Wh... Why the hell would you want to do that?" She asked amazed as she caught up with Jinius. "Do you want your other fracking leg to have a hole in it too?"

Chapter 2

The trip to the Force Nexus was uneventful -- both Jinius and Addenson had expected that. The smooth, barren landscape of Ambria was nearly absent of life. A few herds of staga roamed scattering herds of neeks across the dusty landscape. Beyond those few native creatures, no camps or cities were visible from the ship. Particularly, they didn't see any smugglers or poachers running around. They hadn't encountered any other smugglers since the first batch. From the reports, he'd received the atmospheric sensors hadn't detected any more activity from the hssiss around the lake either. Granted, they could hide. However, not detecting them was at least a little reassuring to Jinius. He also wasn't delusional. Creatures attached that closely to the Dark Side couldn't help themselves congregating around such an intense vergence, a well of unlimited cosmic power, confined to such a small space.

Jinius had brought a med droid along. That was not part of his plan. The thing decided to come on its own throwing some doctor privilege around. He didn't, however, bring any researchers. They weren't too happy about that, but he couldn't allow it. Conveniently, from the researchers, Jinius learned new, amazingly intellectual curses and insults from them that were both witty and surprisingly colorful.

Lake Natth was approximately ten kilometers away from the research outpost. The builders had intentionally built the outpost away from the lake, which was the center point of the Force Nexus, simply because, historically, that kind of power did strange things to people who were too close to it and because of the hssiss. Jinius suspected that ten kilometers away from a Force Nexus still fell within the range of too close. He'd read about moons and adjacent planets in solar systems being affected by the sheer power of a Force Nexus. Ten kilometers was nothing.

"Hunter Griffin, I must go on record and protest you leaving the compound on a mission while your leg is in its current condition," the droid's hollow, monotone voice informed. Med droids were always too cautious. Their programming was too linear, too focused.

"Noted," Jinius replied curtly. The droid had protested endlessly before leaving the compound while insisting it had to come if Jinius was going. Jinius had only planned on stopping by to get some pain meds, the strongest med he could handle that wouldn't put him on his butt before leaving for the trip to the lake.

"Your leg has healed some, Hunter Griffin. However, the muscles are still very damaged. Additionally, your neuro...." the droid started. Jinius cut it off.

"I understand." Jinius rolled his eyes. Medical droids could be grating. He'd spent a lot of time around them as a youth. Living a rough life while having a bacta allergy afforded him a lot of time to get acquainted with medical droids. "My leg will be fine. I don't anticipate any fights. Something tells me that we're welcome this time."

As they grew closer to the lake, Jinius could sense the Force more and more with every passing second. When he'd visited the lake before, he'd been running from the smugglers luring them to the hssiss dens. He'd not stopped to pay attention to the power that seemed linger at the lake. Now he could. It was a pulsing energy that seemed to flow outward from the lake, washing over everything charging it with a power, a pure, unadulterated, unrefined power. Jinius had never been

like the Sith -- they craved power, as much of it as they could get. Jinius craved knowledge -- he wanted to know. Nonetheless, he craved this power. It was intoxicating.

The shuttle sat down a few meters away from the cliff's edge that led down into the small valley that held the steaming Lake Natth. Jinius walked out of the shuttle and made his way carefully down the steep hill into the pit. The soft dirt flexed under his heavy gate. The ground was surprisingly springy considering the large outcroppings that marred the horizon. He could sense the eyes of the hssiss on him. However, he didn't sense the hostility he'd felt before. This time they wanted him close. The Force wanted him close.

Jinius knelt down in the dirt and quieted his mind. He ran his fingers through the dirt and sand drawing long lines in the dust. He could feel the energy throbbing around him. All the distractions of the outpost. The squabbling researchers. His Clan deciding he would run this whole operation. Everything drifted away. He let his feelings and his stress drift off, allowing them to fade into the background noise of the cosmos. He opened his heart, the wellspring of feeling and emotion within him, and released it to the sky. Immediately, he felt the universe jerk. He felt it react to his presence. Jinius felt the underlying energy, the binding power of the universe, focus in on him.

The power lingered just beyond his reach. The Force was normally a well of power available to him. It was constantly within his reach. You just needed to lower a bucket into it and draw out the energy you needed -- enough energy to move a ball, to balance, to soothe emotions, or to see a split second beyond to know what would come next. His well was an abundant well. This well, this nexus, was not a well of power, it was a colossal churning ocean with a powerful maelstrom throwing waves of power to become ripples in the vast sea of eternity. Jinius reached out to it; he knew he couldn't reach it. It reached back.

Energy flowed freely using Jinius as a channel, a conduit, for its flow. Jinius focused the energy, He drew it into his leg. His leg grew warm. He sensed the fibers of his muscles, the pulsing blood, the electric nerves. Jinius sensed everything. He sensed every fiber of him. He could see every cell in his body, every rhythmic action of his heart suspended in his mind's eye. He saw the wound on his leg, an awful gash. The energy pooled around his leg. He pushed the power into his wound. He stiffened as the muscles began to twist and form together. Nerve fibers shot throughout his leg reaching their arms to one another forming a vast biological network. His heart pounded as the flow of energy brought blood to the wound filling it with warmth and sensation. He felt the wound start to close. Then, the nerves reknit -- sensation returned.

Sharp, gouging stabs of pain throbbed within Jinius' leg. Normally, pain meant healing with most wounds. Jinius accepted the pain -- it was a means to an end. More pain. It moved up his leg and into the base of his spine with each ticking second. The energy flowed faster. Jinius had intended it to be a trickle, a tiny twist of the faucet, allowing the Force to flow through him. Instead he had turned on the full flow and it was too much.

As if a heavy bat had crushed his leg, pain throbbed and radiated throughout his leg and into the curve of his spine. It shocked Jinius. He jerked opening his eyes. The bright afternoon light fell on his face casting him in a deep orange light and yet his eyes stayed transfixed, staring off into a distance neither reality or humanity could touch. The wound on his leg closed, sealing itself with a vicious, cruel scar.

Jinius wanted to stop. He wanted to let go of the energy. It did not want to let go of him.

The power surged and grew darker. Jinius could feel the hate, the malevolence, the blight of destruction. He could feel the *darkness*. It swirled around him. It was alive. It was aware. The darkness was hungry for life. Jinius tried to push back. He wanted to resist. He tried to resist but the same energy that had closed his leg wanted him. The power opened, a vast chasm of energy, of life, of death, of everything. Jinius threw his mind and his might against the power. He fought with all that was in him. It was not enough.

Darkness closed in around him. It was unrelenting. It was pure. It was beautiful. Jinius saw why countless Sith Lords had plunged into the deep darkness -- the awesome Force that consumed, devoured, and controlled.

Chapter 3

Addenson leaned against her shuttle watching Jinius as he knelt. She never bought into that whole Force magic crap, but these Brotherhood types sure did. She reckoned he would sit there, meditate like some little weirdo for a few minutes, stand up and pronounce that he had learned some cosmic truth, and then they would all wander back to base. Then, Jinius freaking started glowing.

It wasn't a glow stick kind of glow. It was more of a radioactive glow. Kind of like the blue glow that came off hyperdrives. It didn't radiate from him but it seemed to move off him in waves, like water. Addenson thought it strange but these Force types did weird stuff. A few moments later, the wind around them picked up and rocks and debris around Jinius started to hover of their own accord. Jedi and their like did that sometimes, tried to make rocks float while they prayed, or whatever. The floating rocks began to orbit Jinius, in sequence with the glow.

"What in the hell do you think is going on?" Addenson asked of the droid.

The medical droid looked at her and gave a short of shrug, "I am unsure, Ma'am. My programming doesn't include much about Force abilities or manifestations. I can tell you his heart rate is elevated and his body temperature is up a full degree Celsius. I'm mostly worried by his brain activity. I've never seen activity like this before."

"He okay?" Addenson asked concern marking her voice. Her hand instinctively went to her blaster.

The droid looked over at Jinius pensively. "I am unsure."

A few more seconds passed and the wind coming off Jinius grew stronger. More and more dirt and rocks began flying around him obscuring the view of the Dark Jedi. Addenson couldn't help but think the kid was turning into a tornado or dust devil or some craziness. She was growing more worried. The Clan leadership would have her hide if she let the Dark Jedi in her care die like this.

"I'm gonna help him!" Addenson shouted over the roar of wind. She took a step forward.

She barely moved. Her foot slid a little in the sand but ultimately, she didn't move much. Addenson took another step. With each step closer, the wind grew to get more intense. After she had gotten halfway down the crag, Addenson was straining to take even a single step. It was a tempest of wind

around Jinus and she could barely see his violet robes amongst the dust. The droid was a few paces back but tried to stay close.

Hell, I knew stuff can get weird with these Force user types. I never expected this nonsense, Addenson thought to herself. *Wonder how to get him out of it. I doubt he wants to cause this much trouble, whatever he's doing.*

Addenson pulled out her blaster and set it to its lowest setting. It'd hurt like hell but it may knock Jinus out of whatever trance he was in. She leveled her blaster and took aim. She squeezed the trigger.

The red blaster bolt lanced outward before seeming to catch in the wind and fly off wildly.

Addenson tried again. The blaster bolt deflected off the tempest. She forced herself to take another step pushing in closer. The wind was swirling around Jinus in a fury and the air was beginning to charge from all the sand colliding with itself building up static. She fired two more shots. Both deflected into the maelstrom flying wildly off course. Red flickers of static began dancing among the storm. Addenson pushed closer trying to take the last couple of desperate steps.

Jinus fought the darkness. It pressed in from all sides. Visions of the countless Sith Lords, their empires, their power flashed through his mind. He could be like that. He could rule the galaxy. He only needed to stop fighting. He needed to let the darkness consume him; become him.

"NO!" Jinus cried out. He threw his will against the darkness. He was an ant. A speck. He was nothing compared to the sheer eternity of power, wisdom, and might that thrust itself upon him. It was venom and it was nectar. Jinus fought with all his might, with all his power.

Finally, what seemed like an endless age passed and light began to peek through the darkness. It was a tiny ray. Jinus threw everything at that ray grabbing onto it and pulling it until it grew stronger. Slowly he pushed back. The light grew. The darkness surged against it. Jinus held on.

Jinus suddenly sprung up from the ground freeing himself from the power of the darkness. His lightsaber flew off his belt and into his hand where it came to life out in front of him. His eyes still only saw the tempest around him: the darkness. He heard a clink of metal against stone.

Jinus blinked. He stood in the small valley next to the steaming lake. His blue lightsaber glowed brilliantly in his hands held out in front of him. Addenson stood there, blaster drawn at him. The barrel of her pistol was missing; it lay at Jinus' feet.

Chapter 4

"You fracking piece of bantha scat!" Addenson shouted as she stared back at Jinus. His lightsaber was in her face. She didn't care. "You broke my friggin' blaster! You nerf-loving, scruffy..." Addenson turned and stormed off in a fury of expletives. Jinus marked it as the second that day he'd learned new curses. Addenson was far more colorful than the researchers.

The medical droid didn't waste a second and immediately began looking over Jinus. It got to his leg and paused.

"Remove your pants, Hunter Griffin. It is imperative I analyze your leg," the droid demanded.

"Can we wait until we get back to the shuttle?" Jinus asked.

The Republic fighter pilot's helmet came flying towards Jinus from the direction of the shuttle. It was followed by several boxes and a hydrospanner. The flying items were all followed by another string of insults and curses.

She must have really loved that blaster, Jinus thought.

"Perhaps we should wait a moment?" The droid said. Its voice had a concerned tone to it. "I've heard she is known for trashing droids when she gets like this."

"I can imagine," Jinus mused.

A few minutes later, they were headed back to the outpost. The droid looked over Jinus' leg while Addenson cloistered herself to the cockpit. Jinus could still hear curses and insults coming from the cockpit every so often.

"I have to say, Hunter Griffin," the droid started as it ran a scanner along Jinus' leg, "I have not seen this level of rapid or comprehensive healing of such a wound except in extreme cases. All those cases involved incredibly powerful Force users. You do not fall into that description."

Jinus leaned back and tried to rest a little. "How many of them channeled a Force Nexus?"

"I'm not sure," the droid answered back.

"Probably none. They are incredibly rare. The leg is the least surprising consequence. It was foolish of me to try that. It should have destroyed me. Something either wants me alive or I am the luckiest person in this sector right now. Either way, my report is going to get me in a load of trouble."