

Title: Black Orchid: The Awakening

By: Hunter Jinius Griffin (Gray Jedi) / House Shar Dakhan of Clan Naga Sadow

ID: 10545

Competition: Thirteen Stories: Survival or Submission

Introduction

This story takes place immediately following “Thirteen Stories: Outbreak” and immediately follows my submission titled Black Orchid. A link is provided.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1J7dTBEpFRpzu5M8qnxt-z3NhBuEdygEglTvN_WjOdlg/e/dit?usp=sharing

Black Orchid: The Awakening

Chapter 1

Jinius awakes. Clear water rushes around him pushing him further and further downstream. A cloud of rust colored water flows outward from Jinius. He quickly reaches over and tries to put pressure on his stomach wound. Last thing he remembered was the blaster shot to his belly and falling through the air. The compound was at the top of a cliff. He had to have fallen at least a couple hundred meters. How had he survived?

Jinius looked around, scanning the bank for anything he could grab onto and pull himself out. So far, the current was strong enough to move him but not strong enough to pull him under, he needed to get out. He also had the stomach wound to deal with, a whole extra problem.

The cool river pushed Jinius along two sheer cliffs for several minutes. He kicked and paddled the best he could to stay centered in the water -- fortunately the debris was limited but that could change at any moment. As he went along, the cliffs began to slowly make their way towards him as river carved its way through the forest until they were short embankments just a few meters high -- still too high for Jinius to easily pull himself out but not too bad. Along with the shortened embankments Jinius found more and more trees growing near the water, and even a few growing out of it. Being ever pressed by the flow of water, Jinius tried kicking his way to the edge of the streams now where he may have the chance to grab the spare vine or tree limb that overhang the water.

Finally, after what seemed like one thousand attempts, Jinius' fingers wrapped around the slippery bark of a tree limb that overhung the water. He pulled. Searing, hot pain exploded through his abdomen nearly causing him to let go. Jinius quickly grabbed the branch with his other hand. He pulled again. He was desperate to get out at this point. The wound on his belly still was leaching rust colored blood into the water and he was starting to fill the chill of the water overtake him. Even in warm climates if you spend too long in cold water you can get hypothermia. Several agonizing pulls later and Jinius finally had pulled himself out from the rushing river.

Standing on the soft dirt Jinius looked up. He was surrounded by dense tropical rainforest, as dense as it had been since he had arrived, with towering trees covered in moss and vines

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shielding the dirt below from the brilliant, golden rays of the afternoon sun. Patches of light danced on the ground casting odd shadows from the crooked plants and aged piles of leaves on the ground. It looked like any other place on this planet. Getting back wasn't going to be particularly easy, however, Jinius did have one advantage. He had the river -- the facility overhung the river. Follow the river, find the facility. At least the mission was easy.

Chapter 2

Jinius made his way through the forest. His steps were nearly silent on the soft dirt, though occasionally a twig would shatter the quiet of the jungle. Above, the activity of the jungle thrived. Jinius could hear animals leaping from limb to limb. He could hear the hoots and the cries of birds and mammals often mixed with the chatters and clicks of insects. Jungles were life. Even without trying Jinius could feel the pulsing vibrance of life around him through the Force. Most of the time to have such a clear picture of the life-energy of a place, Jinius had to carefully and consciously open himself up to the Force. In this case, he only needed to be present -- the Force sought him out.

The river wound through the jungle pushing past trees, going under them at times, carving its way to its end where it would spill into a lake or the vast sea. Staying on the banks of the river afforded Jinius an abundant water source to stay hydrated as the water was clear and moving. It also offered him a means of navigation. He'd left most of his exploration supplies aboard his shuttle. Despite the advantages of the river, Jinius knew there were risks. Predators often stalked the river looking for unaware prey who took the opportunity to seek out a refreshing drink. The river bank also made travel challenging. At times the shore became a mess of thick, slimy mud making Jinius advance towards the facility a challenge. It was, despite its risks, still his best choice and his fastest way back to the facility where he could maybe get to the ship and get out.

After what seemed like hours hiking through the humid forest following the curving river, Jinius walked upon a clearing. At the opposite end of the clearing he saw the most unnatural thing he'd seen yet -- a column of gray smoke. Normally smoke in a wooded area wasn't too much of a surprise. However, in this case, the smoke was a clear sign. The air was moist and thick to the point where Jinius clothes were sticky and beginning to cling to his skin. Fire didn't enjoy the company of moisture. In addition, Jinius hadn't heard any storms or thunder to indicate a lightning strike -- one of the only natural sources of fire. Whatever had made the fire had done so intentionally.

Jinius crouched low and stayed just outside the clearing, hiding among the trees, as he investigated the clearing. His hand sought his lightsaber -- he'd forgotten it was gone. Jinius quirked a smile. Despite all his attempts to avoid becoming just another warrior he was still falling into the instincts of a warrior, seeking out his weapon whenever he was nervous.

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The clearing was large enough to land a small shuttle. Open sky allowed the bright, orange of sunlight to pierce the woodland canopy to bathe the ground in light. For whatever reason the clearing was empty of trees which had seemed to be pushed to the outside leaving a circular area of lush grass and weeds. On the far side of the clearing, beneath the column of rising gray smoke, sat a small, round yurt-style building with a thatched roof. A flickering yellow light shone through the small structure's window.

Jinius moved closer keeping low to the ground. He doubted those accursed flowers had followers this far into the woods, but he couldn't be sure. Quickly crossing the grassy clearing Jinius quietly threw himself against the side of the building and peered into the small hut.

A dark figure walked past the window. Jinius quickly ducked down reaching again for his missing lightsaber. He let out a quiet curse before calmly looking up again. A single Chiss male sat quietly at a table in the center of the hut eating what appeared to be a green, broth soup. Jinius watched the man eat for what seemed like quite some time.

Jinius strode out into the clearing and stood in its center. He then took a deep breath and cried out, "Hello. Anyone home?"

The sound of a chair overturning and something falling onto the floor echoed from the inside of the hut. The man had stood from his seat. A few seconds later, the small, wooden door of the hut swung open and the Chiss man appeared at its entrance. He held a blaster in one hand and pointed it suspiciously at Jinius.

The man was average high with deep, cerulean skin and crimson eyes. He wore what looked like an old imperial officer's uniform except that it had no insignia or rank and was very worn, practically rags. The expression on his face was a mix of bewilderment and fear.

"Who are you?" the man demanded. His voice was low and shaky.

"My name is Jinius Lu'Kar Griffin. I am with the Brotherhood of Dark Jedi of the Clan Naga Sadow. I mean you no harm," Jinius said in the most soothing voice he could manage. The smell of the spilled soup inside the hut was making its way out the window -- an intoxicating scent to a man who felt as if here starving.

"Right, I'm sure no Dark Jedi has ever told anyone that before," the man said in a clipped tone.

Jinius raised his hands placatingly and nodded. "I can see your point. Nonetheless, I am not armed. I lost my lightsaber when I fell into the river."

"Why are you here?" the man demanded.

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Doesn't seem like he wants to beat around the bush, Jinius thought. He took a step forward, "I came to research some discovery that was made at the research facility. Something about a rare orchid. What I found was... troubling."

Jinius figured telling the man the truth, or at least a fair portion of it, would ensure that the man didn't sense deception. Of course, the Clan Summit may have other things to say about the whole matter. They weren't there. Jinius had to act in the moment. He had to make a choice.

"Where'd you come from?" Jinius asked calmly as he took a few slow steps forward. "You wear an officer's uniform but not the regalia of an officer. Mind telling me what's going on with you?"

The Chiss man looked down at his uniform and let out a snort before looking back to Jinius, "I guess I figured no one would put those pieces together if I didn't have the damn buttons to go along with the uniform. I worked at the research station. Got out when things got weird. The name is Adruul Goarwin, I was a lieutenant in charge of the landing pad. Things got weird, I ran. That was about two weeks ago."

Jinius' senses prickled. This man wasn't being entirely truthful. There was deception in his voice and Jinius could sense something deep within the man's words -- something the Force was trying to point out to him.

"You deserted?" Jinius asked. If he learned anything from his days of interrogation, he'd learned that a blind accusation sometimes stirred enough in someone's emotions to get them to react.

"You're clever," the Chiss man said a big, toothy smile working its way onto his face. "I'm not a deserter. And I can tell by your reaction that you don't believe I was just some dock master, do you?"

"No," Jinius answered simply. He suddenly sensed a well of anger in the man. "Whatever reason you had for leaving, I am sure we can work it out appropriately. I have no intention of telling anyone about your position."

"Of course not," the man said calmly. He shot Jinius.

Chapter 3

Jinius awoke in a brightly lit room and sheer, metal walls. He could hear the clank of metal on metal a few meters away. He tried to sit up. He couldn't. His arms and legs were strapped down to a metal gurney. Footsteps echoed on the metal floors and a moment later the face of a Chiss man appeared over Jinius.

"You're fine, Mr. Griffin. My blaster only was set to stun. Did you have a nice nap?" The Chiss man's tone had changed. It wasn't shaky or nervous as it had been before. Clearly, he had been feigning. It was firm and intelligent now. The voice of a scholar.

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“Where am I?” Jinius demanded as he struggled against the restraints.

“You haven’t moved far. We’re currently underneath my little hut,” the Chiss man informed. He moved out of Jinius view and the sounds of metal tinging against metal could be heard out of sight.

“This is where it all began, Mr. Griffin. This where the Murakami Orchid was first discovered. This is where I first learned of her capabilities,” the Chiss man’s deep voice echoed throughout the little metal room.

“And what do you intend to do with me?” Jinius asked.

The man continued speaking as if Jinius hadn’t asked a question, “I left the main facility, where I unleashed *her* potential. I want to learn to control her, I want to own the flower and all her capabilities. Unfortunately, she had other plans for me and tried to control me. I left so that I could continue my research unimpeded.”

Jinius struggled against the restraints. The Chiss man’s talking continued in the background. Jinius wasn’t particularly interested in what the man had to say -- he was interested in freeing himself. The restraints were the same kind used to hold down psych patients from a dozen centuries ago. Anymore ray fields or grav-shackles would be used to keeps someone restrained. The benefit was the old-style physical restraints could be overcome. Jinius closed his eyes. He relaxed, taking in deep breaths. He felt the power, the purity, of the Force flowing through him. Jinius allowed the Force to permeate his muscles, energizing them. He felt his arms and legs stiffen from all the power being stored within them. He needed to wait for the right opportunity.

“... the most interesting thing about your blood, Mr. Griffin, is not its potential. We all know the power that is held within a Force user’s blood. Your blood is special. Normally Chiss and human anatomies are wildly incompatible. Don’t get me wrong, we are equipped to mate and biologically can produce offspring, but we share some key differences. Your blood, Mr. Griffin, has a unique immunity profile. HLA type if you want to be precise. Your blood can be given to just about anyone. Even a Chiss.”

The Chiss walked over holding an ancient blood transfusion bag in one hand and stood over Jinius. He leaned over to shove the needle into Jinius’ arm. Jinius broke his restraints.

Jinius kned the Chiss man in the temple sending him stumbling down to the ground. The Chiss scrambled along the floor trying to get footing. Jinius scanned the room in the split second it took him to stand up. It was a small, boxy room only a few meters long and a few meters wide,

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just large enough to hold one bed. The walls were lined with work benches and tables. Against the far wall was a metal door. Jinius noticed the Chiss' blaster resting atop one of the tables.

Hurrying for the Chiss man, Jinius stomped hard on the man's back. The Force still freely flowed through Jinius. He heard a crack. The Chiss man's legs went limp. Jinius walked over to the bench and picked up the blaster. He flicked it to full power.

"How do I stop the plants?" Jinius demanded. Blood trickled down his arm. Apparently the crazy Chiss had gotten the needle a little in before Jinius had broken the restraints.

The Chiss squirmed on the floor, tears flowing from his scarlet eyes. He glared up at Jinius and spat, "If I knew how, I'd never tell..."

Jinius fired a shot.

Making his way out of the room Jinius found yet another lab. This room was lined with monkey cages and had a computer terminal. Jinius quickly sliced into the terminal in hopes of being able to send a message back to the Brotherhood. Unfortunately, the terminal wasn't connected to the holonet. Jinius did, however, find a video recording.

As he activated the recording the face of the Chiss man appeared. The computer blared with sound as monkeys and other animals hooped and cried in the background. The Chiss man stared ahead from the screen indifferent of the sound. He started to speak.

"It's been three days since I left the primary facility. The cameras are still running and most of the compound now is covered with plant material. She's growing. She's seeking out new life and new connections. Interestingly enough, the Dark Jedi we gave her have been taken over, they are roaming the halls and gathering samples of the orchids and storing them in crates. Unfortunately, the Admiral had the forethought to send the shuttles into orbit using the autopilot. She cannot leave this world. Not yet at least. A distress call did go out and I hope that soon help comes. If they come, she'll take the shuttle and begin to spread. Meanwhile, I will continue my research on how to connect to her. Once I figure out how to link my mind with her mind, I'll be able to spread my consciousness in the same way she spreads her vines. I could control the galaxy!"

"Oh God," Jinius swore. He rushed out of the building. He didn't have much to fight back with. He only had the blaster. His only chance was to get to the compound as soon as he could and get a message out.

It was too late. As he walked out of the building Jinius heard the distinct crack of a shuttle launching into orbit. The plant had left the planet.

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