

Learning Who's Who

Rest and relaxation. Jinius had never been terribly fond of those words. As a youth, he'd been whisked from place to place, event to event, often with very little notice or any ability to affect change. He'd watched his parents fall, he'd watched his uncle fall, and in a desperate attempt to add some order to his life, Jinius had fallen himself; he had joined the New Republic Military. Much like his youth except this time in uniform, others determined where and when he moved. Prior to joining the Brotherhood, Jinius's life had been a saga of uncontrol.

Nonetheless, if through force or extremely suggestive coercion, rest and relaxation were the orders that Battlelord Bentre Stahoes, Consul of Naga Sadow, issued the clan. The decision didn't sit well with Jinius. He didn't believe the clan, especially him, needed shore leave. Jinius was still new to the clan. It felt like only a few short breaths had passed since the day Jinius had put on his robes and declared himself a gray Jedi. And suddenly, he'd earned some vacation time? Jinius had not fought alongside his brothers and sisters against the ruthless and indomitable Collective. He'd not borne witness to the razing of the clan home. He had not stood on the transports that carried the evicted clan away from their cities, friends, and families. A break was the last thing Jinius deserved -- He deserved to be on the front lines, leading the charge to retake the clan's home.

The more he dwelt on wanting to liberate the clan home, the more confused Jinius had become. It was odd to Jinius. He'd never had much of a home before joining Naga Sadow. He'd never fallen in love with a place to the point where he felt comfortable enough to relax, to warm his feet by the fire, welcome friends, or even sleep peacefully without fear of ambush. Simply put, he was all but physically homeless. Naga Sadow's home was Jinius's home. He wanted the chance to restore that home. He still had so much to learn about his new home. He would take this opportunity and find out what he could. He may even make friends. At the very least, he was not going to disobey a lawful order, even if it didn't make much sense.

The cantina on Citadel Station was a calming, relaxing place, possessing a classic beauty and an ancient charm unlike most of the Outer Rim cantinas that Jinius had visited. It was also a rowdy den of iniquity. Cantinas were all-too-common on the Outer Rim and were often dirty, dastardly places filled with the sort of people who'd rather take your credits and cut your throat, before even bothering to ask about your day. Citadel Station's cantina was a little different, but it was still a cantina.

The dim fog of the moist atmosphere hovered just above the tables. Off to one corner, a small hearth crackled and burned as flames danced around consuming actual logs. Cushioned tall-back chairs sat in a half moon around the hearth, most were occupied. Throughout the room, a combination of square and round tables flecked the room as patrons hailing from distant and exotic worlds moved around the room. The air hummed with the quiet dissonance of varied languages as both human and alien conversed over classical and fashionable drinks.

As Jinius passed through the room he strode by a table swarmed by Rodians and a couple of brave humans. The group was a fury of shouts and cries of excitement as they rolled chance cubes across the table. Each person surrounding the little table then cast lots trying to predict the cube face that would end on top. As the cube rolled, tumbling about, and rebounding off the cube's points, Jinius sensed the face that was coming up next. It was a subtle hint from the Force, the kind of hint that reminded him he wasn't just a normal, everyday officer anymore. He'd become part of something greater; something he did not quite yet understand.

Ribbons of light played and danced throughout the hazy room. Strangely, the room had a relaxing ambiance despite the constant sea of noise that caused the air to shake with energy. It was noise, but it was sensible, restrained noise and not the overripe, raucous noise that plagued normal cantinas.

Jinius glanced around the room taking in the countenance of the different patrons. His instincts prickled as he examined each person. He saw brief stories -- short biographies about each person distilled into emotion. From one person he found rage, the kind of hate that slithered and oozed through the pores of a man. From another Jinius found loss, the deep tugging in your gut like someone had just punched you in the balls. From others simple sorrow that had become tangible in the form of a liquid poured into a glass; too many thought they could chase away longing and hurt with intoxicant. Everyone had a story. Most stories were boring. Sometimes the story was more real. Occasionally, Jinius would feel a prick deep within his soul: a warning. He'd sense the corporeal darkness within another, the hate and malice for life. The truth was any person in the crowd could be an agent of the Collective. Anyone could be an enemy poised to strike. Jinius never let his guard down, especially in crowds.

Winding through the busy crowd, Jinius rested his hand cautiously on the hilt of his lightsaber. Behind him, the well-greased servos of his droid whirred with each step. The droid was also scanning the faces running them against the Inquisitorious's facial recognition database.

"Master, I think I recognize them," the droid declared pointing across the room at a table.

Jinius cursed. The droid's software was solid -- it was very good at finding a face in the crowd. The droid's other software, its personality, was not as solid. The droid could be kind of dense. Jinius wrapped his fingers around his lightsaber hilt as he passed through the crowd before looking up towards the table. If they were looking back at him, it would surely be a fight. He braced himself and raised his gaze.

A pair of arms shot up from a table against the cantina's far wall. Warrior Erik Cato, Jinius's new Battleteam Leader, and Captain Calenhad sat a small round table. Apparently, today was their day off as well. Jinius relaxed his grip on the lightsaber. These men would not try to kill him. Not today at least.

Giving the others a nod, Jinius quietly and effortlessly passed through the crowd making his way to the table. He was getting ready to sit and have a casual chat. This would be interesting; social norms were not his strong area. He slid into a free chair opposite the other two.

"Jin!" the tanned skin Battle Team Leader, Warrior Erik Cato, exclaimed as Jinius walked up. "Pull up a chair."

"I did," Jinius said simply. He grabbed a drink menu from the center of the table. "I'm already sitting."

"Yeah. It's an expression," Erik said awkwardly. He scratched his head. "So, how's it going? Time for your leave too, I guess?"

"Indeed," Jinius answered. He was planning on getting an intoxicant. He'd never been one for alcohol but figured it was time to try again. It was doubtful he'd find another opportunity to take a vacation in the near future. He anticipated it would be a matter of time before the clan undertook a campaign to retake their homeworld.

Jinius continued, "As for my status: I am doing well. My last medscan was negative for anything of concern."

"Uh... Good." Erik rubbed his chin unsure of how to reply to such a matter-of-fact statement.

A shapely blonde waitress stepped up and sat down drinks in front of Calenhad and Erik. She was young, no older than 20 or so and had long hair which she kept in a ponytail. Jinius noticed the reactions others had to her before he noticed her immediately. He couldn't help but notice her facial symmetry. She was a beautiful woman.

"There you two go." She smiled at Jinius and wrote her name in the air above the table. The hologram of her name, "Claire," lingered while she spoke. "My name is Claire and I'll be taking care of you. Can I interest you in a drink? Corellian Ale and house wells are on sale this evening."

"Good afternoon, Claire. I'll take the Corellian Spiced Ale," Jinius replied.

"I'll take a Mandalorian Rum," SA-TRN93 said in a cheery tone.

"He'll have nothing," Jinius quickly interjected tossing the droid a fierce glare.

"I want to try the rum!" the droid objected stomping its foot on the floor. "I am fully within my rights to..."

Jinius cut the droid off with another fierce glare, "I'm not going to waste credits at a cantina for you to experiment with liquor. Keep scanning the room. Let me know if anything interesting comes up."

The droid signed and went back to scanning the room.

"Where you guys from? We don't get as many off-worlders as we used to. All that mess going on in the Core has slowed a lot of activity our way." The waitress's voice was perky and cheerful. As she spoke she blinked her deep, brown eyes slowly. A strand of golden hair fell obscuring her gaze. She quickly pushed hair behind her ear. It was a soft, simple gesture that drew attention to her perfect bone structure.

Jinius could not deny her beauty. He also noticed her pupils dilate.

"Is it warm in here?" Jinius asked the woman.

"Warm?" She answered back shocked. She'd expected a more conversational response to her question. "Are you hot, sir?" she asked seeming worried.

"No. Are you? You're sweating." Jinius spoke very directly, almost without inflection. "Also, please do not call me sir. You are not a soldier from what I can see, and even if you are, I am not in uniform nor am I your commander."

The woman stared blankly at Jinius. Jinius pulled out his datapad and jotted down some notes.

"We're from the Orian System, ma'am. We're explorers doing some research and stopped here before we head out. How long have you been here?" Erik said trying to diffuse the awkwardness.

"You're explorers!" the woman said with a squeal. "I've always wanted to explore the stars. I'm hoping to have enough credits saved up soon to move to one of the Core or Midrim systems and go to a university. Maybe then I'll travel some."

The girl spoke directly to Jinius. Despite his attempts to distract her away from him, she persisted in wanting to talk with him. She was clearly, almost obviously, interested.

"What's your name, sweetie?" The woman asked eagerly. "For the check!" She added the last bit almost as an afterthought.

"Griffin," Jinius said. His attention had gone to his datapad. He was currently reviewing the mating rites of various humanoid species, including humans. A few seconds passed, and the woman wandered off to put in his order.

Erik and Cal looked at Jinius curiously. He looked back quizzically before realizing he was probably frowning. People didn't like frowning. It made them uncomfortable. Jinius quickly forced a very awkward, and clearly fake, smile.

"You okay, Jin?" Cal asked as concern made its way onto his brow. He took a sip of his drink.

"Perfectly fine," Jinius answered returning his attention to the datapad.

"You sure, buddy?" Erik asked. He tried to hide the amusement in his voice.

"Have I done something to indicate I am unwell? I did tell you my last medical exam went well," Jinius asked looking up from his datapad. A small amount of concern touched at the edges of his face. He'd certainly done something to alarm Erik and Cal, both looked worried. Erik looked more interested than worried.

"Jin! C'mon!" Erik exclaimed throwing his arms up in amazement. "It was obvious!"

"What was obvious?" Jinius asked.

"The girl!" Erik's face was now consumed by a broad smile.

"She did to appear to be a woman," Jinius replied. He turned his attention back to his datapad. "Though one cannot be entirely sure of such things these days."

Erik gave Calenhad a desperate look and looked back at Jinius, "Jin, she was flirting with you. It was obvious." Calenhad nodded in agreement before inclining his head toward the bar.

The waitress stood at the bar. She casually no-so-casual turned to look back at Jinius and gave him a smile when she noticed he was looking at her. The girl made no attempt to hide her affections. He gave her an awkward smile back.

"I'm fully aware she's flirting with me. Her pupils dilate when she speaks directly to me and her skin was flushed. The question as to whether she found the room warm seemed to confuse her indicating she was, in fact, not warm. Both are classic signs of human attraction. To be comprehensive, both are signs of attraction among many humanoids and even some non-humanoid species."

"Jinius, don't misunderstand me and no offense, but you're turning the whole guy-girl interaction into something academic. She's into you. You're young. She's young. You should make good use of your shore leave and get to know her."

"I'm not interested," Jinius started before realizing how it may sound, "Don't get me wrong though! I find her terribly attractive and I am interested in women. I just rather not complicate

my life." Jinius had decided long ago to avoid any close attachments. It seemed to be his curse that anyone who became close to him ended up dying. He didn't need more blood on his conscience.

The waitress walked up and sat Jinius's ale on the table. She then slipped a small torn piece of paper onto the table next to the glass. Jinius looked at the paper then back up at the girl. She quickly looked away sheepishly before smiling at him.

"I'm Claire," she said again. Her cheeks were a deep red as she spoke. "Give me a call if you're going to be on planet for a while." The girl hurried off to another table.

Jinius ignored the paper and grabbed his drink. He didn't need romantic entanglements.

"Please tell me you're going to take her number, Jin," Erik encouraged looking amazed. He couldn't understand someone not being interested in someone who is so obviously interested in them.

Again, Jinius looked up from the datapad. He made a mental note to avoid sitting with people he knew too well in the future. They made his research a challenge. "I don't intend to call her."

"At the very least you should keep her number," Cal suggested. He'd been mostly quiet up until that point. He had been enjoying the back and forth between Erik and Jinius.

"It would be pointless," Jinius answered.

"C'mon, Jin! You may change your mind," Erik encouraged. "You never know. She could be the future Mrs. Griffin."

These two are very intent on this, Jinius thought to himself. He wasn't used to people prying so much into his personal life, despite how small his personal life was. *I wonder how they'd feel if I pried into their personal interactions.*

"It would be pointless, irrelevant, and a waste of the ever-dying cosmic energy of the universe for me to grab that paper. Her holonet frequency is 1138-A1134-ZT27441."

Cal nearly dropped his drink. Erik sat slack-jawed and unable to speak. Shaking his head Cal reached over and grabbed the note. He read the frequency written on the slip of paper. It matched what Jinius had said.

"You memorized the note after one glance?" Calenhad asked. His white and red skin was unable to hide his expression of surprise.

"Yes," Jinius answered matter-of-factly. He finally put his datapad down flat on the table and began eyeing his drink nervously.

Jinius took a sip of his ale. He drew back at the smell coming off the amber liquid. It seemed to roll as it flowed sticking to the side of the glass. The stuff moved like water didn't, more like molasses than anything else. Jinius winced more suppressing a tickle in his throat when the liquid touched his lips. It tasted like droid oil. He smacked his lips trying to dilute the taste. It failed to help and only made the experience worse. Intoxicants were never his drink of choice. He didn't like something that could so easily make someone lose control.

Erik smiled at Jinius, "It's an acquired taste, Jin. Most people can't stand ale their first time."

Jinius was happy for a change in conversation that took everyone's attention off the woman.

"If enjoying a beverage requires me to 'get used to it,' as I am often told about ale, why in creation is it so damned popular?" Jinius asked. He took another revolting sip.

"Look around," Erik said indicating the menagerie of patrons sitting at their various tables. Many of them were showing obvious signs of being intoxicated. Some were stumbling, others simply uncoordinated with their actions, a few were slurring their speech, and even a couple were passed out unconscious, sitting slumped over in their seats. "A lot of these people lost their homes. Many lost their families. They're trying to forget. Intoxicants help with that."

Jinius grabbed his datapad from off the table and began taking notes as Erik talked. Jinius always had struggled relating to other people; he was more of a loner, very introverted. What came naturally to others in social interactions was something Jinius felt like he needed to learn. The notes helped with that.

"Are you taking notes on why people drink booze?" Calenhad asked. He was giving Jinius an almost dumbfounded look.

"Yes." Jinius did not stop typing. He'd take careful notes and study them later in quiet.

Erik laughed a little, "Jinius, I sure do like you, buddy. But I'd be lying if I said don't do some bizarre things sometimes."

"Forgive him, Warrior Cato, he suffers from social anxiety. He doesn't relate to people as well as you or me," SA-TRN93 chimed in his hollow, metallic voice.

"Infernal contraption," Jinius muttered. The droid seemed to think it was more human than he was.

"Belligerent beast," the droid said affectionately.

The three Sadowans sat around the table talking for several minutes. Every so often Jinius would stop and jot down observations on his interactions. They'd all agreed that it was odd to be on leave. None of them expected the leave to end peacefully and all expected a surprise or to be thrust into combat when the clan leadership decided it was time to march. All three wore their standard, combat-ready, gear.

"Knight Jinius!" the droid said alarmed and tapped on Jinius' shoulder.

"Not now, SA," Jinius said dismissing the droid with a wave. "I would rather not your asinine babbling right now."

"Jinius!" the droid said dropping its formality. "Grand Master Ashen just walked into the room."

Jinius turned to see the Grand Master, well former Grand Master, darken the doorway into the cantina. Several Black Guard flanked the Grandmaster turned Aedile of House Marka Ragnos. The towering man walked with the knowing and powerful step that only years of confidence could provide. He scanned the room before moving towards a distant corner to sit out of view.

Seeing a Grand Master was always an intimidating sight. They were masters of aspects of the Force that Jinius had only begun to study in the briefest sense. They also had a shroud of mystery around them. No one ever knew what to expect out of a Grand Master and everyone possessed a healthy fear of their abilities.

Jinius glanced towards the others, "I have a theory about Grand Master Keibatsu." He spoke calmly and quietly.

Both Erik and Cal leaned in close. Muz was a mysterious character. Everyone had theories about him and they wouldn't be surprised if most of them were true. He was an enigma wrapped up in a curtain of power and prestige.

Jinius looked around cautiously. No one was too close, but he knew how the Force worked -- anyone could be listening. He waved a hand and threw up a mild illusion, enough to obscure the conversation.

"I think the Grand Master is in a relationship with Proconsul Ashia Kagan," Jinius said it pausing for effect. He'd expected shocked inhales or surprised expressions. Instead, he found more confusion than anything else on their faces.

Jinius continued, "I was going through some records in the Shadow Academy and uncovered some connections. It appears that a good portion of the Grand Master's estate and the Proconsul's are connected."

Finally, Jinius saw the shock and surprise he was expecting creep across the eyes of the other two Sadowans. After a moment Erik sat back in his chair, moving his hand to his mouth.

"You're telling me that you just now figured out that Grand Master Muz Ashen Keibatsu and Procounsel Ashia Kagan Keibatsu are in a relationship?" Erik asked. He was legitimately shocked. "Seriously?" His tone wasn't the kind of awestruck surprise Jinius had expected. It was more puzzled-shocked than amazed-shocked.

Jinius nodded and started to speak. Calenhad cut him off.

"Jin..." Calenhad started. A small smile was working its way onto the Captain's face. "That is not a secret."

Erik slapped both hands down on the table and let out a hooting laugh. In a matter of moments, everyone at the table, excluding Jinius, were laughing so hard they were drowning out the rest of the room. Even the droid was letting out chimes and tones indicating laughter. A pair of bouncers started to make their way over while the gazes and glares of other patrons fell of Sadowans; everyone assumed the trio had had too much to drink.

"What do you mean?" Jinius asked startled at their laughter.

"What do we mean? Everyone knows that they are married! They've been together for a while, Jin!" Erik answered through hoots of laughter.

"Wait, that is common knowledge?" Jinius asked. His shock far exceeded the shock of the others at his table at this point, "How long has everyone known?"

Cal and Erik both slapped the table as they let out laughs. Erik's a hooting, deep laugh, and Calenhad's a strange, alien laugh mixed with almost a hissing tone. Tears had even begun to make their way down Erik's cheeks he was laughing so hard.

"Forever?" Calenhad remarked. He was laughing, likely as hard as Erik. However, his red and gray lined skin didn't reveal as much of his emotion as a human would. Regardless, Calenhad made his share of sounds and his expression was certainly lighter than it was earlier in the evening.

"I see," Jinius replied. He tucked his head looking down at his datapad. He pounded in a search query and the image of the Procounsel popped onto the screen. Her dossier clearly listed her as married to the former Grand Master. Jinius had followed the facts, like any good researcher; the problem was he'd only followed the facts so far -- he never completed his inquiry.

The three sat mostly quiet around the table. Jinius tried to recover from his embarrassment despite the other two reminding him that anyone could have made the mistake. The

occasional chuckle or huff broke the quiet as Erik or Calen had remembered the conversation. Objectively, it was funny and Jinius knew he'd find it so eventually. In the meantime, he chose not to say much in light of the revelation; he was a little too embarrassed. He instead chose to finish his drink even though every sip sent a shiver up his back. That stuff truly was revolting.

Jinius suddenly perked up. He'd been distracted by his revelation about the Grand Master and the Procounsel of the clan being married. There were a hundred other things he could be talking about. Some far more interesting than his previous discovery would have been, had it not been already well known.

Gossip is a fundamental part of interpersonal interactions -- especially among humans, Jinius remembered as he sat quietly. Blending in was never his gift. He always struggled being "normal" and was always more focused on his research and studies than improving his relationships. He was taking the forced leave time as an opportunity to practice blending in. He was a member of the Inquisitorious after all; it was a matter of time before he was ordered on a mission.

"I believe I have at least one other piece of information that may be of interest to you," Jinius said calmly. He ran his finger along the edge of his glass pensively.

Erik raised an eyebrow and smiled. "Please tell me you know that Consul Bentre Stahoes and Tasha'Vel Versea are married too." Erik had made the statement almost absently.

Immediately, Jinius looked dejected. He hadn't known that. It was what he was getting ready to reveal. It was supposed to be a juicy secret. A little gossip to intrigue and entice his counterparts. Instead, he sat stunned by Erik's statement.

"Jin... Jin, please tell me you know that already," Erik demanded. A smile was already working onto his lips.

Jinius swallowed and nodded towards Erik in a resigned gesture, "That too is new information to me." He had a measure of defeat buried in his tone.

Calen had spit his drink across the table. An amazed smile fell on Erik's face as he began laughing. The human nearly fell from his chair as the laughter took over.

"Don't we have some rules against fraternization?" Jinius asked. The New Republic military had rules that prevented couples from forming in the military ranks. The rules were particularly strict against commanders and their subordinates from forming relationships. It was a conflict of interest.

Erik wiped tears from his face and smiled at Jinius, "We don't have any rule about fraternization, Jin. At least at those levels, we don't."

"I guess knowing about Grand Master Muz and Counsel Bentre's respective relationships isn't secret. I suppose you all have heard about DarkHawk's new fling then?" the droid suddenly said speaking in its hollow, inhuman tone.

Everyone looked over at the droid in absolute surprise. They, apparently, had not heard about DarkHawk's fling.

"No. We haven't," Jinius replied simply.

If a droid could look nervous, SA-TRN93 would have looked terrified. The droid went stiff and stared blankly into the distance for a moment. The droid then stood and spoke loudly, drowning out the raucous cantina, "Grand Master Ashen, this moron didn't know you were married to Ashia!"