

Competition: There is No Place Like Home...

By: Jinius Lu'Kar Griffin, 10545

Jinius strode down the street. Around him, commuters pushed and shoved their way past one another. Each was in a hurry to get to work. Big cities had one common theme: ambition. Nearly everyone who moved to a large city was interested in making their place in that city. Little did they know that they were all mostly lemmings. They shuffled from one task to another while their superiors fed off them. The higher you climbed the more power you acquired the more detached and monstrous you tended to become. Fortunately for Jinius, he wasn't one of those lemmings.

Brakes squealed next to him as a black car pulled to a stop next to him. Jinius checked his watch. His driver was on time. The man quickly made his way around and opened Jinius's door.

Inside the car was plush black leather with red trim. In the corner sat a decanter filled with a luxurious brown liquor called "Scotch" endemic to this world. Jinius personally didn't care for the stuff but when you were in his position you endured a little "luxury" in favor of the company it afforded.

Across from him sat his droid. The droid was dressed in a fine suit and was using a crude holoprojector to keep the riffraff from realizing what it was.

"I still argue that I look ridiculous in this," the droid protested. He still hadn't gotten used to the suit.

"Any luck?" Jinius quietly asked. He picked up an orange from a basket in the corner and allowed it to hover just off his fingers. Fortunately, the hyperspace accident that had drug him lightyears across the galaxy and centuries into the future had not disconnected him from the Force.

"The new AI launch went smoothly this morning. Already the US Department of Defense has signed a contract to utilize it for their new supercomputing grid. Seems like the world has caught the quantum computing bug," the droid rambled absently.

"I'm not interested in some half-thought AI we are deploying to continue the illusion that I'm not some sort of alien. I'm interested in your research into how the hell we are supposed to go home." Jinius shot the droid a glare.

Since his arrival on this backward planet called Earth, he'd realized the technology he was used to was centuries ahead of the current population. They hadn't discovered hyperdrive, had barely started to experiment with antimatter, and were still busy figuring out that fission was going to be their doom if they kept strapping it to rockets. This lack of development on Earth's part was advantageous because Jinius was a decent slicer. Back with the Brotherhood he'd not been a brilliant slicer, merely average by comparison, but with knowledge of quantum computing and advanced AI subroutines he stood out as one the greatest minds on Earth.

In a matter of a few years, he'd founded a computing company and had usurped the largest tech giants of the time. No one could compete with his innovation. Sure, his patents would expire eventually but he had enough technology to stay ahead for at least a century or two.

"Well, Knight Griffin, you are an alien. Sure, your DNA matches theirs but you're as alien as those creatures in their absurd holos," the droid said absently. "But to answer your question, not much. We've got seven of our largest AI grids working the problem right now. All we got is it was likely a transient hyperspace anomaly that shot us across the galaxy while subjecting us to time dilation. We experienced a few hours while the rest of the universe experienced a few centuries."

Competition: There is No Place Like Home...

By: Jinius Lu'Kar Griffin, 10545

The next few minutes of the drive were silent. Jinius knew that getting home was a lost cause. The laws of the universe, the very fabric of creation prohibited rolling back the clocks. He wouldn't be able to return to when he came but maybe eventually, he could return to where.

There is no sense in dwelling on it. This has been the last five years. Jinius thought.

The drive was short and Jinius spent most of it lost in thought. Once at his office Jinius continued with his usual routine. He drank coffee, just like the rest of them. He talked about "sports" just like the rest of them. His droid even prepared a list of highlights from several television shows and current events so Jinius could participate in any conversations. It was all a ruse.

The sound of a knock at his door brought Jinius out of his focus. He'd been looking over the specs for the next AI release. He always trimmed them to ensure that the leaps weren't too dramatic.

At the door stood a young, fit redhead woman. She wore a white dress that didn't leave any question as to the athletic form that hid beneath it. Jinius chuckled in his mind. She was attractive but he didn't have time for frivolity, or at least any more than was expected of his station.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Mr. Griffin, I was just notified that Mr. Zuckerberg's car is arriving," the young woman said with a smile.

Jinius was taken for a moment. He'd been so quick to dismiss this girl the countless times he'd looked at her. He wasn't dead – he *enjoyed* looking at her. Never had he taken much chance to genuinely appreciate her. She was young. She was pretty. And, based on his hiring requirements, she was smart. That almost trumped everything else.

"Clara?" Jinius asked suddenly. He hadn't even realized he was going to ask before he did.

"Yes, Mr. Griffin?" the girl answered with a warm smile. She stepped fully into his office allowing the door to close behind her.

"Tell me if I'm overstepping, or if this is inappropriate. I wanted to know if you had any plans this evening?" Jinius asked. He immediately regretted the question. He could already see the headlines talking about how the powerful tech lord seduced and manipulated his underling.

Clara gave him a worried expression, "Uh. Wow. Umm."

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked. Please..." Jinius started.

"No!" Clara said suddenly. "No! It's okay. I just have plans this evening. My sister and I have plans. But I'm free tomorrow."

Jinius was shocked. He hadn't expected that to go so well. He stood dumbfounded for a moment before clearing his throat, "Seven o'clock? Italian?"

Clara gave him an extremely warm smile and bit her lip slightly.

This is going WAY too easy. Jinius thought.

"It's a date, Mr. Griffin." Clara turned and left the room.

Competition: There is No Place Like Home...

By: Jinius Lu'Kar Griffin, 10545

"What part of 'I want to go home' suddenly died in your mind?" the voice of his droid echoed from the corner. It hid behind a holoprojector most of the time and only spoke when the room was completely empty.

"Men of my position entertain ladies of hers," Jinius answered back with vitriol.

"Right. You have worked with her for two years. You have watched her squeeze into outfits that I could have sworn required a running start and you barely noticed her. Suddenly, you're interested? You are getting used to it here."

"Perhaps," Jinius confessed. "However, if you continue with this line of questioning. I will see to it they use you to build the chassis for a new car. Go... go figure out how to get us home."

A moment later Clara appeared at the door once again. This time she was flanked by the unmistakable form of Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook. Jinius had been trying to get them to use his AI for some time. Their datacenters running his AI would add a tremendous amount of computing power to his search for home.

Jinius motioned for the pair to enter the room. Clara opened the door allowing Mr. Zuckerberg in first. She followed.

"Mr. Zuckerberg, I'm James Griffin. It's a pleasure to have you here."

"Mr. Griffin. Thank you. I've wanted to visit for some time. Your technology is compelling and something I've been following with interest for five years now."

"Well. I suspect this conversation will be one worth your time then. Before we begin, can I offer you anything to drink?" Jinius motioned to a decanter in the corner. He had to fight back the look of fear that lurked behind his lips.

"Yes, actually," Mr. Zuckerberg answered.

Suddenly, out of nowhere Jinius felt something he'd not sensed in a while. He felt the touch of the Force. Not in the way that he had a connection to it. This was someone's touch on him. A distant, long-forgotten dread rose to prominence in his mind.

"Do you have anything Corellian? Maybe something Mandalorian?" Mr. Zuckerberg asked with a smile.

"I'm sorry. We don't have any..." Clara started. She was cut off as Zuckerberg thrust his hand out towards Jinius and sent a wave of telekinetic force into him sending him flying across the desk and into the wall.

Clara let out a scream as the air flashed. Jinius's droid came charging from behind his hologram with his staff in hand.

The sound of an igniting lightsaber filled the room and Zuckerberg took a stance against the charging droid. The two met with the droids glowing blue-violet energy staff connecting with the crimson fire of the Facebook CEO's lightsaber.

Competition: There is No Place Like Home...

By: Jinius Lu'Kar Griffin, 10545

"I knew I felt something cold in the room. That was a clever trick," Zuckerberg sneered as he stared down the droid.

Jinius lay on the floor gasping. The blast had knocked the wind out of him. He plucked his lightsaber from under his desk where it was hidden in a small compartment. In one motion he vaulted the desk bringing his blue lightsaber down in a powerful downward strike.

Zuckerburg caught Jinius's blade on his own parrying the attack. At that moment, the droid slammed its staff into Zuckerberg's side sending violet energy coursing through the man. With a groan, the Facebook CEO pushed off Jinius and stepped back to put his back against the wall.

The droid leveled his staff and charged point first at Zuckerberg. In the last second, Zuckerberg stepped to the side avoiding the lunge. The droid drilled his staff into the wall sending pieces of drywall falling around him. Before he could turn around, however, Zuckerberg was on him. In a blur of quick motions, Zuckerberg sliced one of the droid's arms off and spun around to thrust his lightsaber through the droid's chest.

Jinius moved forward in a rush as his droid's optical sensors flickered out. He would mourn that confounded machine later. He had to survive first and mourn later. He came in defensive this time. Zuckerberg was clearly the better swordsman and by far the more powerful of the two. Jinius's stood with his blade held out and in front pointed up and forward slightly.

Zuckerburg stepped away from the crumpled droid and towards Jinius. "It seems like we both had the same idea," the man leered as he paced towards Jinius his lightsaber held low and to his side.

"How so?"

"Bring the brilliance of our galaxy to this backwater world. I've almost got them you know," Zuckerberg laughed. He pointed towards Clara. "They are lemmings. I tell them what to watch, who to vote for, and even what to buy. I create and break relationships all with a few lines of code. Give me ten more years and I'll have them dying for me on battlefields. Another twenty and they will sell their souls to me."

Jinius glanced over at Clara. He'd almost forgotten about her in the fight. She was crouched in the corner of the room between the wall and the drinks table. Her face streaked with dirt-stained tears. Poor girl had no idea what was going on.

"So, what do you say?" Zuckerberg asked. He shrugged in a way that seemed to indicate the whole room – the whole world. "Join me. Together this little planet becomes ours in a few decades. You never know, in a few years we could have this galaxy under our thumb."

"It doesn't work that way," Jinius replied. He still held his lightsaber ready.

"Of course, it does. You're young and naïve. You don't yet grasp what conquests await us. Join me!"

"No, I understand. I don't work that way. I don't want to rule or destroy or conquer. I want to know."

Zuckerburg's posture relaxed for a moment as a look of disappointment fell on him. He looked down and shook his head. "Pity. Oh, well. You win some and you lose some."

Competition: There is No Place Like Home...

By: Jinius Lu'Kar Griffin, 10545

In a moment Zuckerberg brought up his arm and sent out another powerful force blast. Jinius was ready this time and at the last moment he threw up a barrier catching the blast. The collision sent a shock out shattering the windows in the room sending glass raining down on the floor. Clara's scream echoed against the explosion.

The blast had driven Jinius back, but he still stood. Zuckerberg on the other hand was staggered. Jinius charged forward sweeping his blade wide in front of him. It was a desperate move. It wasn't enough.

Zuckerberg slapped the attack away as if Jinius had come at him with nothing more than a wet reed. At that moment he thrust out his hand and seized Jinius in a force choke lifting him off the ground. Zuckerberg began walking pushing the strangled Jinius towards the open window.

"It is a pity. We could have done great things together. You see, this is a lonely life. Veiled in secrets and shadows. How freeing it would have been to rule with someone like me nearby. Someone who shared something with me. This world is empty and bland. It's filled with glorified cavemen who think themselves the smartest things in the universe." He pressed forward pushing Jinius closer and closer to the open window.

Zuckerberg let out a roar of pain and tossed Jinius to the ground away from the open window. A letter opener stuck out of his side. Clara stood defiant before the angered Zuckerberg. He thrust out a hand and grabbed her by the throat. There wasn't anything fancy about this attack – he wanted her dead. Zuckerberg moved her closer to the window to drop her out.

"It was a lovers quarrel. Murder-suicide, you see. Pity how things fall apart like that," Zuckerberg laughed as he moved closer to the open window and the twenty-story drop. Clara flailed and slapped wildly trying to fight him off.

Jinius squirmed on the ground trying to regain himself. His vision swam with darkness still creeping along the edges. He could hear the thunder of his heartbeat in his ears as his body rushed to move air around again. It had been close. He needed to lash out. Jinius stood up and let out a burst of the purest form he could muster. The focused wave of energy slammed into Zuckerberg's back sending him staggering towards the open window. With a gasp, the Facebook CEO fell.

Jinius watched as Zuckerberg went over the edge and into the distance. However, at the last moment, he saw a flash of something. He saw white going over the edge. A white dress.

"Oh no," Jinius gasped as he raced towards the window and peered down.

On the street below Zuckerberg lay motionless, a mess of crumpled parts in the street. Next to him lay a small female form. Jinius watched her lips move slightly, begging for a tiny breath of air that would never come.

The white dress was stained with dirt and blood. It wasn't white anymore. Clara lay beside Zuckerberg. He'd been holding her out the window when Jinius pushed. Jinius had killed them both. A sinking feeling filled him. She'd been his hope. His chance to get used to this life. She'd been his first step into acceptance after five years of suffering and waiting. And now... now she was already fading in his mind. He'd never appreciated her. Not just as an employee but as a person, a soul.

Competition: There is No Place Like Home...

By: Jinius Lu'Kar Griffin, 10545

The emptiness swelled within Jinius. Anger and rage followed in a rush to fill the emptiness. This world had embraced that monster as a god. He was just another dark ruler whose machinations had brought ruin to Jinius. Never again. This time things would be different.

Jinius stepped away from the window. He already heard sirens from the street below. Of course, his employees would have called for help when the fight broke out. He'd have a hard time explaining this one. It wouldn't matter long. They couldn't hold him for long.

A whirring sound sounded across the room. The droid pulled itself along the floor.

"K... Kni... Knight Jinius," the droid said through a crackled and broken voice.

"I'm alive," Jinius said simply. His plan was beginning to form.

"I... I... I am in need of service," the droid muttered.

"We'll fix you. I'm going to need you for what is coming," Jinius answered coldly.

Police were in the office now moving across the room.

"C'mon droid, we have an empire to create," Jinius said as he walked towards the door to greet the police. "I will rule this planet and protect it from those who would prey on it."

Epilogue

1 Year Later

"Mr. Griffin?" a steady voice asked from across the room.

Jinius turned in his chair. Nancy stood at the door to his office. She was an older woman, in her 60s he guessed. She wasn't Clara. She wasn't anything like Clara. Clara was... gone.

"Yes, Nancy?" He asked quietly.

"Mr. Bezos just arrived," she said with a smile.

"Thank you. Send him in immediately when he arrives."

As Nancy left the droid stepped out of the shadow at the far side of the room. Immediately his holoprojector flickered and he took the image of Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon.