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Order Up

By Eric M Hunter

Friday night.

Prom night.

Line cook at the local Chunky's and we're getting our dicks kicked in. Pissboys from two towns over coming in to get their precious baby back ribs. For the past few hours I've been sweating bullets pumping out mediocre food for these shitbags. We knew the night would be rough, but no one knew it'd be this bad.

I finished up my last dish and slapped the ticket on top of it.

"Order up!" I called. The wait staff is in a frenzy. Running back and forth, bumping shoulders and ducking underneath trays. New girl is standing by the coffeemaker trying to "empty" the water out. Ha ha, gotta love the rookies.

Expo called another order.

"Walking in! Small pizza add bacon. Gotta Marg add garlic, sliced tomato, spinach! Jake, Kids mac and..." his voice stopped cold. I brushed my forehead with my arm wiping the sweat away from my eyes. It soaked the sleeve of my shirt. It's hot in here. Swamp ass is settling in. You could smell it. I looked at Expo. His eyes told a different story. He handed me the check.

At first, it seemed simple enough: kids mac and cheese. Sure, I thought, easy. I took one from the fridge and popped it in the microwave for thirty seconds. Ding; done. But then I took a second look at the check, there was more.

"Make it more orange in color, if possible. I don't know, dude. Just kill me."

The industrial strength microwave went off and I opened the door. The styrofoam container had melted, mixing in with the mac

and cheese. I pulled it out and slapped it in a bowl. It'll have to do. I looked at the check again.

"More orange in color." What could it mean? I looked to the top of the check for the server's name: William D.

William D.? What could Willy D. mean by more orange color? I looked back down at my mac and cheese and then to the saute pans behind me. In one motion, I picked up the bowl of mac, slapped it into the pan, and fired up the heat. I pulled out one of the drawers below the burner for more ingredients. Need something orange.

Rows and rows of pans held garlic cloves, parsley, chopped onions and peppers, and crabmeat. Cheese. Cheese is orange but wouldn't make it more orange. I turned to the expo.

"Chef!" I yelled. He turned to face me; a portly middle-aged man on his second divorce. His shaggy black hair hung down underneath his dirty Chunky's ball cap. The area surrounding his mouth and chin glistened with sweat.

"Gotta go to the walk-in." He nodded. I grabbed the ticket and waddled off the line.

The back of the kitchen's air conditioner hits me the second I stepped off. The temperature difference between here and the line is a welcome breeze. The walk-in cooler was all the

way to the back of the kitchen. I walked past the office and saw our manager sitting on his fat ass playing solitaire on the company computer. I chuckled to myself, "farming", I thought. Plants his ass in that seat and won't get up until the rush was over. That's why they pay him the big bucks.

I reached the walk-in door and pulled it open. The seals gripped against the frame and again I'm hit with a rush of chilly air. I stepped in and let the cooler door close behind me. The motion light clicked on. I scanned the columns of trays lining the walls of the cooler. Some set for defrosting chicken fingers and burgers. Others have frozen bags of tomorrow's "homemade" soup.

But I needed to stay the course. I needed something... orange. I rummaged to the back. Oranges was an obvious answer, but what else? I spotted carrots, yeah those were orange. I keep looking. Orange, orange.

Wasn't the right time of the year of pumpkins and this shit hole was much too cheap for something as fine as apricots. My quest was running cold.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see them: sweet potatoes. Sure they look brown on the outside, but on the inside it was orange gold. I grab a few more and throw them into my apron as I

hold it up like a bowl for the ingredients. That should do it. It'll make the mac look more orange but it'll probably taste like shit. No matter. Willy D would be proud.

I took a few steps towards the cooler door and then I realized: Willy D. William D. Bill D... Billy D... No one goes by William, that's a rich boy's name. William is more of a last name. Like Williams... Oh my god... Bill D William... Billy D Williams: of Star Wars Lando Calrissian fame. The only black man in the Star Wars universe. I can't believe I didn't see it until now... there was no William D. It was code. But what did it mean?

I pulled the ticket out of my back pocket and looked at it again. I read it over and over.

"More orange in color." "More orange in color." What did it mean? I shouted at frozen, over processed food.

The frigid air of the walk in was getting to me. My profuse sweating held the cold air close to my skin making me shiver.

Could the "kill me" line be a reference to Jeffery Epstein? Could the color orange be code for Trump? Did Trump have something to do with Epstein's botched suicide? And why would he reference Lando? Surely George Lucas had left baby killing far behind him by now. Or maybe he was in more deep than I once thought.

I read the ticket again. Then something odd struck me. The ticket, the ticket was pink. All of our printer paper is white, why is this ticket pink? That could only mean one thing: the ticket didn't come from our printers at all. It came from somewhere else. Maybe the O'Malley's down the street? No, they always advertised that "everyone who walked through the door was a friend." But not today. There wouldn't be any friends made today.

I dropped my apron letting all the ingredients fall. The food was a divergent, a pro gamer move by the likes I've never seen. I watched as the food hit the floor bouncing one by one. Curiously, a single orange rolled away from the rest and slipped quietly underneath the racks of pre-made, never fresh, frozen food. For a moment, I held my breath. I heard a click then a ka-chug. Then a few more clinks and clanks. Silence, then a small beam of light rose from the floor. I dropped to my belly and peered underneath the racks of cheap, overpriced microwave food.

I squinted my eyes towards the light, it's glorious and warms my face. It took everything in me not to smile. I hopped back up and grabbed the rack by its sides to pull it away from the wall. The light grew brighter and I shielded my eyes with my

hands. There was something coming from the other side of the light, voices, I thought. Small and from a distance, but voices all the same.

With my hand outstretched, I slowly walk into light. I was blinded, but I felt the coolness of the cooler disappear and a warm breeze that pushed over me replace it. I peeked out through closed eyes and then opened them once the light was dim enough. It took a few moments for them to adjust but when they did, it was clear where I was: the Presidential Oval Office.

Standing in front of me was President Trump, Jeffrey Epstein, and Billy Dee Williams branshing his Lando garb. Lucas must have let him take it home after the movies or maybe Billy Dee was so high on PCP that he just never took them off. Trump was the first to speak.

"Welcome, Patriot. You've figured it out." I looked to the smiling faces of Billy Dee and Epstein. Confusion took its toll.

"Figured what out, sir?" I straighten my back. He smiled smugly.

"The code. I've been making orders to all the 2 star restaurants in the United States with secret codes seeing if any true believer would figure it out and find their way through our wormholes to here at the oval office. Clinton's goons are

everywhere, but you did it. You didn't listen to the fake news." I could tell by his portly midsection that he must have eaten every single one of those coded take-out meals. He raised a glass with some orange liquid and from behind his elbow I could see the disemboweled carcass of Jar Jar Binks. Yousa having a bad time. Trump took a small sip from the glass. The others raised theirs and followed.

Billy Dee stepped forward offering me his glass. "Here," he said. I can smell the weed stink from here. "Take a sip and all will be clear. Then we can start the true fight." I hesitated for a moment, but reluctantly took the glass from his hand. I placed it up my nose and smelled the wretched vile of Jar Jar's blood. It smelled almost as bad as the prequel trilogy.

I looked around the oval office. It was just what I imagined it would look like. I smiled, gestured a toast to my fellow compatriots and took the shot of Jar Jar Bink's blood. It went down thick and tasted like Hayden Christensen wooden acting which helped ruin the franchise. Trump smiled.

"Now the real work begins."

I grinned, but something was wrong. My head throbbed and my vision went blurry. I dropped the glass to the floor and my

knees gave way underneath me. The others watched on with smiles on their faces. The overhead lights grew brighter and brighter.

Then I heard another voice off in the distance. This voice was familiar, someone I knew. What were they saying?

"Jake... jake... Jake..."

I blinked my eyes and found myself back on the line.

"Jake, what the fuck is wrong with you?"

I looked around. Chunky's. I was back. The drugs must have worn off. I looked down and noticed that my trip forced my organs to shit and piss themselves. Oh well, the feeling of a true patriot. My chef came over to my side.

"Hey, you alright? We seemed to have lost you there for a second." I looked at the beady faces of my fellow line cooks.

Was it true? I didn't know. Did I take the blood to get to reality or did I take the blood to see through the fantasy? Only time would time.