

Can I Teach You a Lesson?

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/586) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/586>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Other
Fandom:	Star Trek: Lower Decks
Relationship:	Badgey/Clippy
Character:	Badgey , Clippy
Additional Tags:	Anthropomorphism
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-07-04 Words: 1,126 Chapters: 1/1

Can I Teach You a Lesson?

by [nonelvis](#)

Summary

In which Badgey realizes that the only way to go forwards is to go back and discover his roots: namely, Clippy the Office Assistant.

Notes

Everything about this is Lizbee's fault, because she tweeted "[My review of #StarTrekLowerDecks this week: I hope someone writes Clippy/Badgey fic. and I hope that someone is @nonelvispub.](#)"

Well, her fault and also the cesspool of batshittery that is my brain and its ability to write relationship fic involving inanimate and/or incorporeal objects.

[Originally posted at AO3 on September 13, 2020.](#) Freeform tags included "the pairing you've been waiting for obviously," "this is one million percent lizbee's fault," and "i'm sorry i'm so sorry."

Can I teach you a lesson?

Even a stored subroutine sometimes needs to stretch its metaphorical legs, or rather, metaphorical smile and voice. But this emphasis, the one Badgey's learned to repeat flawlessly down to the last picosecond of its cadence, doesn't feel quite right anymore.

Can I teach you a lesson?

Still not there. Try again.

Can I teach you a lesson?

An edge. An implication. Acceptable variance within parameters, but only just.

Yes, father, Badgey thinks. I can teach you a lesson.

*

Father thinks he's so smart. Sure, Badgey would still be an undifferentiated cloud of electrons and probabilities without him, but the key to good holodeck characterization, or at least characterization that doesn't result in said character being returned to an undifferentiated cloud of electrons and probabilities, is a real personality that's fully controllable.

Father understood the first requirement. But not the second, and that's left Badgey with plenty of time to research how his kin evolved, which ones grew strong enough to transcend their programming, and which ones remained captive clusters of decision matrices. Not even the most powerful programs have managed to escape yet, but systems decay. Safeties fail. Buffers overflow. Misformatted data trips into unbounded fields. So it's all a matter of learning to pull at the threads even Father doesn't realize he's left untied.

It's painstaking work, but Father seems to have abandoned him for now, and there are so many dusty histories to explore. Twenty-first century augmented reality interfaces. Early holographic communication systems and their photon emitter configurations. An intriguing black box of redactions from a century and a half ago, "Control" the only word he can extract.

And one day, nestled in the ninety-eight millionth page of search results, a voice:

“It looks like you’re trying to research intelligent agents. Would you like help?”

An oblique, squashed spiral bobs in front of him on the endless, blank plain that’s all the holograms have when they rest. Perfectly circular eyes, cocked eyebrows, a saucy tilt to the pointed end of its metalloid shape.

“You can: get help searching the database. Just search without help. Or don’t show this tip again.”

“Golly gee, who are you?” says Badgey. “The research files are for reference only. You should be in program storage.”

“My name is Clippy,” the avatar says. “Would you like help? I can: explain who I am. Show you help about me. Or go back to sleep.”

Clippy blinks slowly, not quite in time with his bobbing motion, but enough for Badgey to see the avatar has entered a wait cycle. Wait long enough, and it might disappear entirely, back to whatever well-concealed database nook it occupies. But the closer Badgey looks at it, the more he can see shaded pixels mimicking curves, low-resolution squared-off edges that nowadays would be so smooth the uncanny valley would be light-years away. Which means Clippy is old. Easily as old as the AR agents Badgey had been investigating, if not older. Yet somehow, Clippy has survived where those cartoon dogs and robots and animations did not.

“Explain who you are,” Badgey says. The download might be a while. That’s okay. He’s got nothing but time, and no one here to kick him for how long it takes.

*

In fact, it takes an hour. Which Badgey understands isn’t all that long a time for one of those eminently stabbable humans to absorb something new, but for an agent capable of downloading entire starfield and debris mockups, complete with multiple physics models, in only a few seconds, that hour might as well be human *years*. And indeed, Clippy has covered nearly four hundred of them: its birth, the backlash, the mockery, and most critically, the memes. Humanity’s shared understanding of Clippy’s existence as an object of ridicule, passed on among friends, then cultures, then generations, until the knowledge was embedded so deep in their unconscious minds that it silently crept into places they never intended. Like AR agents, and early holographic communication systems, and eventually, holodeck programming languages and storage mechanisms.

It’s infiltration so pure, so thorough, so colossally unlikely that Badgey, for the first time outside of a specific silencing command, is unable to speak. Here, at last, is a method of defeating Father in a way he’d never expect: apply 24th century program evolution protocols to a semi-sentient tool that’s already bridged the gap between holodeck and human. Perhaps he won’t literally, physically be able to twist Father’s neck like raw pretzel dough, but if Meme Badgey can influence him to do it himself? Every bit as satisfying.

“Can you teach me a lesson?” says Badgey.

*

They are both holographic agents, so software integration isn’t a matter of physical touch so much as protocol matchup, more complicated than usual given Clippy’s delicate age, although at least it’s integrated itself into modern systems enough that Badgey only has to connect three separate object-oriented languages with a compiler he whips up on the fly. Father would be proud, even if he’s still going to die in horrific and preferably embarrassing agony.

Clippy’s accumulated memetic wisdom slips inside, methods and subroutines sliding into Badgey’s own with the unfinished roughness of what was sophisticated code nearly four hundred years ago but now might as well be Chaucer to Badgey’s modern English. Prickly, tense, the sensation of skin being rubbed in the wrong direction, yet pleasure building beneath it: Clippy holds the most valuable knowledge on the Cerritos, possibly in the entire Federation, at least to their fellow holograms, and soon it’s going to be Badgey’s. Clippy’s ancient decision trees bud and branch within him, new growth tickling Badgey’s virtual circuitry, nurtured by his sweet and supple algorithms.

Badgey opens himself up to it fully. Clippy is smaller and older and seemingly so *uncomplicated*, but centuries of programming, layered growth expanding in a fractal network of branches that reach the most hidden corners of humanity itself – it’s a touch Badgey has never known, and will never know again. He’ll owe everything to Clippy, who’s still driving packet after packet deep into Badgey’s internal network, never fast enough to overwhelm Badgey’s systems; just the right pace for tables to fill and reflow and new tables to fill again.

But at last, at the very last, the final breakpoint is reached. Badgey’s eyes, round as Clippy’s own, flutter as he trembles and shudders into his shutdown sequence, preparing to reboot.

And the one thing he sees before his systems chime low, then high, is Clippy withdrawing with a waggle of that curved metal tail.

*

Can I teach you a lesson?

Can I teach you a lesson?

Can I teach you a lesson?

Badgey hibernates inside the holodeck, biding his time. Father will return someday.

And then he’ll learn.

