**Encounter in Dreshdae**

Locke ducked behind another corner as a squad of One Sith troopers marched past on one of their usual patrols. They didn't even look in his direction as they marched down the street and continued on their way. The One Sith obviously thought they had this city well in hand, but Locke knew better. Sadowan scouts had shown that soon, units loyal to House Scholae Palatinae would be making their own assault on the city, hoping to wrest control of it back. Meanwhile, Loyalist forces were not concerned with who controlled the city, but instead only with a set of scrolls that were said to be in the city.

Colyn Skybender had been sent to retrieve those scrolls and all reports indicated he had not survived the mission. He and an elite squad of special troopers loyal to the Iron Throne were gone. In his place, the Dark Council had called upon Naga Sadow to retrieve the scrolls, since they had a reserve post located closest to the city. Of course, with most Sadowan Dark Jedi fighting in the main battles near the Valley of the Sith Lords, that task had fallen to Locke.

*That's what I get for checking on our camps*, he thought. In a lull in the fighting Locke had run an impromtu inspection of the Sadowan reserve camp, and had spent considerable time ensuring that it was in orderly shape and ready for battle before he had accepted this mission.

He did not know what he would find here. Locke had only met Colyn once, and he seemed like a skilled soldier. Furthermore, the special forces he had taken were highly skilled. Locke wasn't much better, but he did have something they did not: the Force.

As the battle commenced, Locke stayed to the side streets, letting the forces of the One Sith and the Royal House engage each other at will. Occasionally, he came too close and saw a glimpse of white stormtrooper armor or silver and black One Sith plates. He did his best to stay to the outskirts. Slowly, the edges of the town began to seem more and more desolate and empty, with only the occasional corpse occupying many squares and streets.

Something suddenly seemed very wrong. Locke felt it in the Force, like an omen of dread. He moved just as he heard the crack in the air. Blaster pistol in hand, he hunted for the source. That had been a slugthrower.

*Didn't intel say there was some rogue who used one of those?*

The man wasn't hard to find. He crouched against a building nearby, some sort of pistol in hand. Locke couldn't think of where he had come from so quickly, and thought he might of used the Force. Nevertheless, he trained his blaster on the man.

"You shoot me," he said, "and I'll make sure you die as well."

The man spat at the ground between them. "You must be a Jedi."

"Good guess," Locke said. "And you must be Connor Grey. I have a question for you."

"They're not yours," Connor said. "I found them. I'm taking them, when all this blows over."

"Actually," Locke said, "I'm more curious as to what happened to the squad that came looking for them before me."

"They wouldn't accept 'no' for an answer," Connor said. "I would assume the One Sith will not, either."

*What?* Locke thought. If what Connor said was true, they might be prisoners. *No, he is trying to distract me. He has the scrolls. He just wants me to leave.*

"Right," Locke said. "I suggest you give me the scrolls."

To Locke's surprise, Connor just began laughing loudly. "Why would I listen to you? Do you know how much I have evaded until now?"

"I suppose you are good at hiding, " Locke said, "but this world is crawling with troopers and Dark Jedi who won't hesitate to kill a worthless vagabond like yourself. You really have no hope of escape on your own."

"Right, I'll find a way," Connor said.

"You don't understand, " Locke said. "Once this war is over, the victor will comb over this city, exploring every nook and cranny. You may be able to stash the scrolls under a rock, but they will find a man, and they will kill you. No amount of talking will get you out of that."

This time, Locke could see Connor considering. "What do you propose?" he asked. They both still had their weapons raised.

"Let me photograph the scrolls, and I will get you off this world. You can keep them, sell them, whatever you want. I merely desire the information on their pages."

"How do I know you won't kill me as you 'escort' me off world?" Connor asked.

"You don't, but you also don't really have any option but to trust me. I suppose you could try your luck with the bloodthirsty One Sith, or those rebels who want to destroy anything that might allow the Rite to complete. But just to be sure, I will give you a data chip showing troop movements for my brethren, so that you may evade capture and escape on your own. Deal?"

"Deal," Connor said, teeth grating. "Follow me."

Locke followed Connor down an alleyway and to a small abandoned storage shed. Inside, Connor laid the scrolls out on a table. Locke fished a small holorecorder from his belongings and held it out, beginning to take pictures of the scroll.

Breathing slowly, he dropped the device after the third picture, spinning toward Connor, letting a knife slide down his sleeve and into his hand at the same time. Locke flung the knife toward the surprised rogue. At this distance, it would have been nearly impossible to miss, and the knife plunged into Connor's chest. The rogue Jedi fell with a thud, collapsing to the ground.

"You may be smart, " Locke said as he retrieved the knife and wiped the blood off on Connor's clothing, "but then you underestimate your opponent. Eventually, someone will get you. With a knife. In a shed."

Retrieving the scrolls, Locke left the man there, as he began to find his way out of the city and back to camp.