**Confronting the Past**

"Enemy Within" Competition Entry - Ashes Fall, Week 2

Augur Locke Sonjie, 10311

Reality warped around Locke, the catacombs evaporating. When it settled, he was in a completely different place. A lake stretched to his left; a bed of wildflowers to his right. He recognized this as a place from his childhood. He and his sister Kiana had come here when he was young, to enjoy the quiet tranquility.

Now, instead of calm, peaceful waters, the lake bubbled and gleaned with a reddish tint. The flowers, once multi-hued and beautiful, were now smoldering, as if they had been on fire recently. Their petals were brown and black, but still attached.

Locke looked up, hoping to see the familiar Bakuran sky. Instead, he saw only roiling clouds, with occasional lightning between them. It was eerily silent. Locke waited for the resulting boom of thunder, but none came.

Finally, his eyes settled on the man who stood a little way ahead of him. That man had been observing the world, too, but now his eyes set on Locke. He was tall, the same height as Locke, with the same hair, and the same eyes, but something was different. His expression seemed darker and more intense. The dark side seemed to churn around him, as if he had some effect on it. His eyes were sunken into his head; his face gaunt as if diseased.

Locke knew, somehow, that this man was himself, or some aspect of himself. *Is this what the dark side will do to me if I choose it?*

He decided then that he would never become like this.

When the other him spoke, his voice was like gravel grinding against rock. "So, here we are," he said, lips turning up in a slight smile. "This is nice."

"What is this place?" Locke asked, even though he knew. Somehow, he knew what this was. *I'm inside my own mind.*

The other Locke smiled more broadly. "You know," he said.

Then, something unexpected happened. A part of Locke's mind that he had long suppressed seemed to surface, breaking through the barriers he had set in his own mental landscape to seclude it.

A woman appeared from the right. She was tall, dark-haired, beautiful even, and Locke instantly recognized her.

"Amelia?" he asked. "Why?"

The dark Locke snarled before she could answer, mouth opening in anger. "You bring her forth, now? After all this time, you cannot face yourself alone? You hide behind false images, behind this - this mirage?"

"No," Locke said quietly. This was a test. Amelia had once appeared to him at times, frequently offering advice. He was certain now that she had been a part of his mind, or something to that extent. He knew that was madness, so he had banished her. He had isolated that part of himself. Why was she here?

*This is a test,* he thought, *I must face myself, and she is part of myself.*  Did she represent a darker part of him? A broken mind that could not function without madness? Was that all she was, an aspect of his madness?

"I am not mad," Locke growled. "I don't need you, Amelia."

The darker Locke laughed with glee as Amelia turned toward Locke and frowned. "I'm just here to help," she said.

"I know," Locke answered. "But right now, you are in the way."

As he summoned the Force, Locke found that it came even more easily in this place than in the normal world. He lunged forward, lightsaber in hand, the emitter pressed against Amelia's stomach as he embraced her. It was the first time had ever touched her; had ever even felt her physically. He hesitated only a moment, then ignited the blade.

"I am stronger now," he whispered, lips to her ear. "I no longer need you." Amelia gasped, slumping on Locke's weapon. Her body disappeared before it hit the ground.

A strong wind rose and buffeted the area. Locke crushed it, willing the air to stabilize. This was *his* mind. He did not need an apparition to control it. He had only one task left. The Bakuran looked up at his darker alter ego.

"I do not need her to destroy you."

The other him tossed his head back and laughed loudly. "Fool. You do not realize the power the dark side gives us! You should surrender to it completely. Let it guide you. You have eliminated the part of your mind that was holding you back, now embrace the dark side!"

Locke paused. Amelia had been holding him back from the dark? No, he did not believe that. This darker version of himself would say anything to sway Locke. Regardless, he was stronger now. Even if she had represented some light aspect in him, he did not need her.

"I am not light," he said. The dark Locke smiled. "Nor am I dark." His alter ego frowned.

"I am a Gray Jedi," he continued, voice rising. "The Force is my tool. I do not submit to the dark side. I do not cloud myself in the light. You are not an aspect of my future, but instead a representation of the past! You are baggage which must be removed."

The Force in the area surrounded Locke now, enveloping him. He felt it's power surging through his body. It seemed that with each word, he grew stronger. Amelia had not even fought back or seemed to see him coming. Would this dark Locke be similarly easy to defeat?

"You are so foolish," his darker self said.

"No more lies," Locke answered. "No more fractures. My mind is my own. Begone."

He leaped forward, sunfire blade streaking toward his other self. The dark Locke ignited his own weapon, a shocking, viridian blade springing to life. Was it another relic of his past? It was unimportant. The two blades clashed, sizzling together. Locke heard the thunder now. Lightning crashed around them. Thunder boomed overhead.

"This is my mind!" Locke bellowed. "And you are not welcome in it!"

His words seemed to give the Bakuran speed. He spun, weapon slicing up left, then down to the right in quick succession. Each strike cut a narrow gash across his other self's chest. The man growled and cried out, stumbling backward.

"Fool!" he shrieked. "You do not know what you give up!"

As the storm subsided, Locke stepped forward, voice like ice, calm within the void. That void had replaced his need to rely on other aspects. It was a trade off, but one that he welcomed. "I give up only useless waste," he said.

He plunged his lightsaber through the chest of his other self and the world suddenly went black, warping again.

When it ended, Locke found himself laying on the floor of the catacombs. The event was over, but how much of it had been a dream, and how much reality?

*Did I really kill Amelia*? She had once appeared when he had needed her, but had not for a long time.

He looked at the roof of the chamber, speaking to no one in particular. "Was that a test?" he asked, anger rising. What *had* been the purpose of that? "Did I pass your bloody test?"

There was no answer. Locke stood up, looking around. He did feel different, somehow, but was not sure if it was good or bad. If that had been meant as a test, why had Amelia even appeared?

Shaking his head, Locke left the room, turning back to look one more time. It was dark, but he thought he saw a figure there, one he could not describe. A breeze drifted by him, wind against his ears in the confines of these catacombs. As he wondered where it had come from, he seemed to hear a soft whisper in the wind.

*I will always be here for you,* it said.