

# **The First Step**

*A fiction by Locke Sonjie*

**Private Chambers**

**KSD Damnation**

**Enroute to Orian System**

The hour was late by standard time. The whirling vortex of hyperspace cast jumping, unnatural shadows on the plain durasteel walls of the room, serving as it's only illumination. It was entirely quiet, save for the distant hum of ships' engines and other systems, a mixture of sounds that created the background noise that permeated every large starship. There was only one being in that room.

Sitting cross-legged, Locke stared out at that vortex - or rather, his eyes did. His thoughts were elsewhere, his mind turned deep within itself. The events of the conflict at Mygeeto played through his mind: their cause, their unfolding, and, most importantly, their result.

They had a new enemy. They had lost an ally.

Clan Scholae Palatinae had betrayed them.

Locke knew he should have seen it coming. The Royal Clan - as they liked to call themselves - had done the same to Plagueis. At the time, it had helped save Sadow from a long and bloody conflict. It had been the beginning of an alliance. Now, however, the truth had come out: The followers of Palpatine were traitors, and likely always would be.

Sadow had sacrificed good soldiers for a lost cause. A message had been sent to the Dark Council, informing them of Scholae's deceit, but it never seemed to get there. Instead, the message was lost or intercepted. Locke suspected the Inquisitorius was involved, but he could not be sure. Perhaps they had grown suspicious of their agents who disappeared in Sadowan territory, or maybe Scholae agents had gotten to it somehow. Locke was not sure.

Regardless, the disciples of Sadow stood on their own for the time being. They had no allies, no friends, and had more enemies than ever - Scholae, the Dominion, the Inquisitorius, maybe the entire Dark Council.

It was time for change. Already, Locke had sent a heavily coded message to a different Consul. It would take patience to see how that played out. In the meantime, he had other matters to deal with. Sadow had to find any possible advantage it could, no matter where they had to look.

Locke sighed. There was so much to do, with no discernible timetable for it. An attack could come a year from now, or next week. They had to get ready. Still, it would not do to rush and

bungle something. The Consul knew he had made mistakes. He had been soft in the past, but perhaps it was time for change.

*One step at a time.*

First, he would have to free himself of distracts. The old syndicates that had once served as Sadow's cover still plied their trade across the Orian System. They were criminals, yes, but now they served as eyes and ears where they had once been the lattice of Sadowan power within the system. They had grown bold as of late, demanding greater payment and level of station for their efforts.

They would have to be removed and a new intelligence network established in their wake. Locke's stone expression broke in a slight smile.

It was time for the first step.

**Communications Hub**  
**KSD *Damnation***  
**Sepros Orbit**

"Captain Miels," Locke said, "thank you for returning my call so quickly." The translucent blue hologram of a model soldier filled the air over the dias in front of Locke, the form flickering occasionally.

"What can I do for you, Lord Consul?"

Locke cringed inwardly a bit at the title, but he let it slide. Maybe that sort of thing would give his followers a boost in morale if they had a figure to rally around. But was that him?

*I must be hard.* He had told himself that before. His eyes flickered to a bust of Naga Sadow in one corner of the room. It was merely a recreation, a decoration. There was nothing to say if that was how Naga Sadow himself had actually looked. Still, it gave Locke pause to harden his resolve. *I will be as he was: determined, without compromise.*

"It is time for a change. The syndicates grow bold. They think that because they feed us information, they can demand anything. It is time we remove them from the equation and replace them with an intelligence service of our own design. You have overseen our relations with them for quite some time, and I understand your job has been difficult"

"Yes," the Captain said. He nodded. "Very difficult. Still, to do this thing, it will anger them greatly. There will be backlash - perhaps even war, of a sort.

*Let them come at us*, Locke thought, *our troops need the distraction*. "Indeed, but one must get their hands dirty to succeed. Give the order, inform me of any response."

## **12 Standard Hours Later**

"Sir, urgent message from contact Kilo - Alpha - One - Nine. They threatened to "rip out my wiring and wear it in their hair."" The robotic, droid attache voice spoke with an impersonal, level tone, as if that wasn't a harbinger of ill-will.

"Put it through," Locke said. "Hello," Locke said, after a chime.

The voice that answered was calm, but as ice. It seemed to be female, but perhaps not human.

"*Consul*," it began sarcastically. "I see you have decided to stop sending us our allowance."

"Ah," Locke replied, buying time as he pulled a file up on his datapad. "Lora Kos, is it? You're in charge of the What can I do for you?"

"Listen up, *Consul*, we don't mind not having to run your information any more, but we still expect payment. Meet us at the abandoned North Ridge Refinery outside Seng Karash, and we will discuss this. Don't try anything funny, or we'll divulge what we know to the entire system...everyone."

"Oh," Locke said, voice absentminded.

"We know about Kiana. Wouldn't want the Sith to discover your Jedi sister."

Maybe it was the recent feud, or just his mood, but Locke barely twitched at that. "Very well, we shall meet."

He cut the comm feed and activated another one, this time to the Warhost Fleet Command. "This is Locke, I'll be needing the *Covenant*. I am sure that Darkblade will not mind."

Threaten him, would they?

*I will be as hard as you*, Locke said, gazing at the bust of Naga Sadow.

**North Ridge Refinery  
Outside Seng Karash  
Aeotheran**

"They call themselves the "Kiffar Death", or KD for short," Captain Miels said. He led the way as a few plain-clothes Warhost troopers escorted Locke toward the rendezvous.

"They're an all Kiffar gang. We're not sure how they got to the Orian System, but they're very influential in the underworld of Seng Karash. Their leader is Lora Kos, and their members can usually be recognized by the skeleton tattoos on their bodies. The more covered, the higher rank they are, but they always leave the face bare, of course."

"Of course," Locke answered, "wouldn't want to be ID'd at a glance. Let's get this over with."

They found the Kiffar surrounded by a trio of three large storage tanks, rising as dark shapes in the background. Lora was in the middle, with her own followers arrayed around her. She held no weapon, but one was holstered at her hip, while her arms were crossed beneath her breast.

"There you are," she said casually, unusually calm for one meeting a Force User. "Didn't bring any of your Sith-wannabe buddies today, I see."

"Just didn't want any unnecessary complications. Hi Lora."

She just smiled. The two had only met briefly before, when Sadow had used "the Syndicate" as their cover identity while gathering power to retake the system from the myriad factions who had ruled it after Dlarit fell. Lora always seemed like she had something to hide.

"Only three men? Mighty trusting," she said.

"Oh, you know," Locke said, keeping his voice level. "I've got snipers. I'm sure you brought a few as well."

She merely grunted. She might have been the superior gangster, but Locke had the Warhost for tactical support. They knew how to keep him safe.

"Let's get this over with, Lora. What do you want?"

"Money," she said bluntly. "A lot. Here." She tossed a datapad to Locke, who had to call on the Force to catch it in time.

He held up the screen and arched an eyebrow. "Twenty million credits?"

"A small sum for your clan, I am sure."

"Maybe through back-channels," Locke muttered, referencing the shell organizations and civilian groups the Clan had an "interest" in. The Dark Council would never allow them to be so rich otherwise.

Remember, *Consul*, you have to put in blood to get blood out."

"Very well," Locke said. "You'll have it in two days. Are we done here?"

"Yes," she said. "Don't disappoint us."

Locke made a small sound, then turned and departed, his retinue following.

When they made it back to the shuttle, Captain Miels spoke up. "Uh, Lord Consul, are you actually going to pay them?"

"No," Locke said. He could almost *feel* himself getting colder. *I will be like Sadow. I will be hard.* "Signal the *Covenant*, give them the coordinates we just met at. Order them to fire and obliterate the refinery."

Lora and her people had not come in a shuttle. They wouldn't be able to get away in time.

As the shuttle departed, it turned. Locke watched out a view port as turbolaser fire lanced down through the cloud cover, decimating the facility he had just met the Kiffar Death at. He felt their members die, but could not pick out Lora specifically.

"As you said," he muttered, "you have to put in blood to get blood out."

The first step was over, but there were many more to come.

**End**