

# An Issue of Ethics

By Locke Sonjie

*"Forbidden Fruits: A Tale of Two Cookies" Competition Entry*

**Starport  
Kel Rasha  
Aeotheran**

"Cookies?" Locke asked.

"Yes," the courier said. The human spread his hands. "I don't know, I just deliver."

Locke held up the tray, careful not to tip it over. He could smell them inside. He suddenly wished he had eaten a little more for lunch. "No return address, just says 'Forbidden Fruits Zeltron Cookie Co.'. Huh. Zeltron, that can't be good"

The courier shrugged. "I wouldn't know, but I've got other things to deliver." He nodded slightly, then pushed his hovering mail cart away, soon disappearing into the nearby throng of people. That left Locke, alone, at the entrance to the hangar slot where his ship now rested.

*Who would send me cookies?* Locke thought. It was a party-sized tray, so it was clearly intended for multiple individuals. Besides that, the Augur was on a diet. He wasn't about to eat any of these cookies, much less a whole tray.

There weren't many people in Naga Sadow who Locke would share a cookie with. If he had to be honest with himself, there were probably only a couple. He *could* just leave them in the breakroom at one of the Warhost facilities, but they might be poisoned. He'd need to have them analyzed.

Thinking, Locke smiled. Sang hadn't been that happy lately. He could probably take time out of his busy schedule to enjoy a couple of cookies. Plus, it wouldn't be odd for him to order them to be tested for poison.

Holding the tray carefully, Locke turned back toward his ship.

**Consul's Office**  
**Temple of Sorrow**  
**Sepros**

Sang looked down at the tray of cookies on his desk. "My tester says their clean, but honestly, why you? Was there a note or anything? Perhaps something like, 'sorry about your fleet, here's some cookies'?"

Locke winced, sitting in a fairly comfortable chair across the desk from Sang. If it hadn't been such a big desk - and Sang hadn't been his Consul (and sort of his friend) - he would have reached across that desk and slapped the other man.

"Don't remind me," he grumbled. "No, there was no note. I don't even know any Zeltrons. Honestly, I despise them! So many times back in the day, one of my fellow soldiers would meet one at a bar, and *something* bad would happen."

The current Consul raised an eyebrow, picking up one of the cookies. He leaned back and examined it, not bringing it anywhere near his mouth. "Isn't that a likely scenario when alcohol is involved?"

"Yes." Locke put his hands up, a short distance apart. Then he spread them as far as he could. "But when Zeltron are involved, it was much more likely, and much, *much* worse. I mean, on your average drunken night, you might misplace the keys to your landspeeder, or lose a piece of clothing, or crash your starfighter in the middle of a herd of banthas."

He paused, taking a breath. Sang looked at Locke, a questioning expression. *Don't ask*, the Arcanist thought.

"Anyway," Locke continued. "If a Zeltron was talking to one of us, then I could expect something much more insane, like, he spent his retirement fund to purchase a rancor, or he might show up naked when he reports for duty the next day," he quickly continued as Sang opened his mouth, "while covered in tribal tattoos." One guy even stole a Corvette. Yes, the entire thing. We had it jury rigged for a *massively* reduced crew and this guy...well, let's just say, it wasn't the best gift for his new love, and that 'love' disappeared after the event.

Locke stopped, looking at Sang, who just looked at Locke. The Arcanist could imagine the Consul trying to decide which part to ask about. Locke really didn't want to explain any of it. He leaned forward. "They're just bad, okay?"

"Well," Sang said, finally "they look like good cookies." He took a bite of one and put on a thoughtful look. "And they taste pretty good, too."

"Glad you approve," Locke said.

"Anyway," Sang continued, taking another bite. "I'm glad you stopped by. I've been meaning to talk to you about that Clawdite you let escape the other day."

Locke rolled his eyes. "*Let* escape?" he asked incredulously. "I managed to keep up while chasing him through an entire, heavily defended pirate base." He tossed up a hand, gesturing to the door. "Chances are, one of these other yahoos would have puffed up their chest and charged straight into a barrage of blaster fire, because they're too arrogant or too stupid to think to be cautious once in awhile."

"I'm glad you hold such a high opinion of your comrades," Sang said, quietly.

Sighing, Locke leaned forward, looking at the cookie tray. "Which one did you eat, anyway?" While waiting for the poison test, they had read the descriptions. These were *not* the kind of cookies his mother used to make back on Bakura.

"Ah," Sang said, "it was 'Binks Delight'. It was delightful, to be sure."

Locke cringed inwardly.

"Anyway," Sang continued, "I want you to get back on that trail, find that Clawdite, or at least find *something* that leads us to him."

"I'm a diplomat," Locke said.

Sang just looked at him.

"I'm a soldier," he continued, "a pilot, a Jedi - but I'm *not* an investigator!"

"Well," Sang answered, "I'm giving this assignment to you. Do you really want one of the other 'yahoos' on it?"

Waving his hands in the air, Locke sighed again. "Ok, no, you got me. I'll work on it."

The Clawdite in question had been part of a group of pirates the Clan had recently fought. The pirates had set up shop on a Sadowan world, so the Sadowans had chased them back to their moon base. In the process of negotiations for their surrender, one had revealed he was Iktotchi and been killed, and another had revealed he was Clawdite - and then escaped. Needless to say, Sang was not thrilled to hear that the Dominion was involved. They had had been - and probably still were - a powerful group of races who blamed the Sadowans for their enslavement at Sith hands thousands of years ago. They had been quiet for quite some time, until recently.

"And of course," Sang had said, "*you* of all people would discover they were a problem again."

"I know, I know," Locke said. He looked at the cookies. "Let me read those descriptions again. If you don't mind, I might have a use for some of these cookies..."

**VT-49 Decimator *Gemini Alpha***  
**Rendezvous Point Epsilon-Kilo-Zero-Two**  
**Near the Oriani System**

Wrex analyzed the cookies with his photoreceptors. The subroutines in his programming that simulated emotions told him that he should be experiencing amazement - in fact, he was. He was amazed that organic beings could interpret the smell of something, and derive pleasure from it. It further amazed him that they would even enjoy *eating* something. He did not enjoy plugging himself into a recharging station. It was simply something he had to do if he wanted to continue to function.

These organics were certainly odd. Wrex turned his rudimentary head toward Locke. He did not need to turn his head to talk to the human, but he did so anyway. "So your plan, if I am understanding correctly, is to bribe the Captain with this food?"

Locke did not turn his head. Wrex thought that was sort of rude. Here he was, making an effort to communicate with a human as humans might, and the human in question didn't even notice. "Yes," Locke said. "One type of cookies, the ones labeled 'Chemical Romance', supposedly are laced with pheromones. I'm going to use them to convince someone to help me."

"Oh," Wrex said. "I see." He didn't, really, but he was a pilot droid. He supposed it wasn't really in his functionality to understand.

Instead, he talked about something he did understand. "We are coming up on the other ship now. They are hailing us, and asking what we want." It wasn't exactly in those words, but the description would do. Humans were far less peculiar than droids. The room for error in their statements was alarming, but none of them seemed to mind.

Locke did turn his head then, and he smiled. "Ask their Captain if he would come aboard, it would be my honor to receive him."

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Captain Berov Malcov was fairly normal as far as Warhost personnel went, although quite young for the role. Locke hadn't read up on his dossier, but he must have performed well to end up Captain of his own starship at so young an age, even if it was just a Corvette. Outside the

*Alpha's* meeting room window, Locke could see the triangle-shaped hull of the *Raider* class corvette above his own ship, where it had docked. Unlike its larger cousins, the *Raider* was not large enough for a hangar of its own.

The Captain removed his hat and ran fingers through dark hair. He was a little shorter than Locke, and nodded at the Augur, speaking in a curt, Coruscanti accent. "You wanted to see me, Augur?"

"Yes," Locke answered. "Just to ask for a favor. Just call me Locke. Here, sit."

He offered Berov a seat, and the man sat down at the table. Locke had placed the cookie tray directly in front of him, filled with the *Chemical Romance* cookies. He somewhat regretted how he was about to manipulate this man, but he hoped it worked regardless. Sang had denied him any sort of material aide - so Locke was going to have to be creative.

The Augur seated himself across the table from Berov and sighed. "I need your help," he said. "I've been instructed to find information about a specific Dominion officer. To do that, I need Dominion personnel to talk to."

"Those aren't easy to find," Berov said. He glanced down at the cookies, then back up at Locke. The man was not intimidated by Locke - he was probably one of the least threatening Sadowan Dark Jedi - but still didn't ask for a cookie.

"Oh, sorry," Locke said, as if he hadn't been thinking about those cookies constantly. "Go ahead and have one."

As Berov picked one up and bit into it, Locke continued. "Yes, but I know that they have supply lines the Warhost sometimes attacks. I need you and your ship to help me board their ships and kidnap personnel. I'm hoping one will know of what I'm looking for."

"That's kind of crazy," Berov said, finishing off the cookie. He picked up another, pausing with it halfway to his mouth. "You have to understand, the food on our ship is awful compared to this."

"Have as many as you like," Locke said.

Berov finished off the second one. "Why didn't we just receive orders from Warhost Command?" he asked.

*Because, I'm disobeying a direct order,* Locke thought.

Instead, he lied. "It's just a very secretive mission, so they sent me undercover. Don't tell anyone."

"Still..." Berov continued. He picked up a third cookie. Locke was starting to wonder how many it would take for the desired effect.

"Will you do it? For me?"

Berov looked up. His pupils had changed somehow. "You have nice eyes," he said, seemingly out of nowhere.

Locke cringed inwardly. He felt bad for manipulating someone already loyal to him. *Sorry*, he thought. "Uh, thanks. So, are we ready to get this show on the road. You can take the cookies back to your ship and share them with the crew. My treat."

"Anything you say," Berov said, uncharacteristically.

*By the Force*, Locke thought, *I didn't think they were supposed to change people that much!* Maybe they hadn't gotten the formula right, or maybe the label was misleading.

Either way, it appeared he would have the help he wanted.

**Patrol Route**  
**Deep Space Rally Point Alpha-One-Zero-Nine**  
**Edge of Dominion Space**

"You convinced another human to become infatuated with you to get his help?" Wrex asked. His vocal modulators produced something that resembled surprise mixed with disgust.

"Yes," Locke said, gazing out the cockpit of the *Gemini Alpha*. A micro jump away, the Raider I Corvette *Iron Will* waited to be signaled, Locke hoped. He didn't know how long the cookies effect would last, and he didn't want to think about how he would do this without help.

The *Alpha* had been broadcasting a distress signal for awhile now. Locke just hoped the first ship to acknowledge it would be from the Dominion.

"From what I know of human ethics," Wrex continued, "that violates multiple principles that my databanks indicate you would usually abide by."

"Yeah well," Locke answered, half-paying attention to the droid while he watched the ship's scanners. "Something something dark side."

He was saved from having to argue ethics with a droid by the sound of the *Alpha's* main computer console chirping.

"Ship coming in," Locke said. "CR90 Corvette...*Assassin* modification."

"Are you sure this will work?" Wrex asked. "It seems a little suicidal, even for a human."

"Quiet," Locke said. "They should -"

"Hailing message coming in."

"Put it through," Locke said.

A gruff, alien voice crackled through the ships' speakers, in a dialect Locke did not recognize. "Unidentified transport. This is the Corvette, *Knife of Ba'lon*, prepare to be boarded. Consider yourselves prisoners of the Dominion of Free Races.

"Oh, that's new," Locke said. *Free Races. I'm sure that's what the Iktotchi would want them to think.*

"Send the signal," he added softly, ignoring the hailing message for now as the Corvette moved toward them.

"Already sent," Wrex said, his voice modulator simulating a sigh and a sarcastic tone. "Did you *really* think I would wait?"

Locke just smiled, watching out his viewport as the dagger-shaped *Iron Will* emerged from hyperspace, her turbolasers and ion cannons immediately opening fire on the Corvette.

Then Locke did open hailing frequencies.

"*Knife of Ba'lon*. This is *Gemini Alpha* of the Warhost of Sadow. We shall be boarding you shortly."

## **Meeting Room**

### **Sadow Flagship *Harbinger***

#### **Two Days Later**

"So, we interrogated the prisoners, and found out a few locations our target likes to visit. We're one step closer," Locke explained.

"I'm not happy about this," Sang said.

Locke sat in a chair behind the Consul, who stood looking out one of the room's view windows.

"But I accomplished the mission," Locke said. "No harm done."

Sang laughed a little. "Except the ship captain who has a strange obsession with you now."

"Oh," Locke said quietly. "I thought that would go away."

"Of course you did," Sang answered. He sighed and sat down across from Locke. "What did you do with the rest of the cookies?"

"I..um, gave them to our prisoners. As a gift of goodwill. And got them drunk before interrogation. I'm definitely going to recommend four out of five stars on these cookies. Dangerous, delicious, and useful."

Sang just rolled his eyes, mumbling something about the ethics of Dark Jedi.

*Yeah well, Locke thought. I didn't ask for the damn cookies.*

**End**