

# *One More Loose End*

Locke Sonjie, 10311

Locke Sonjie landed his ship, the *Gemini Alpha*, in a clearing near an nondescript ancient ruin on Aeotheran. Some distance from Kel Rasha, it was a crumbling pyramid that did not even reach above the treetops. In fact, it would have probably gone unnoticed save for the energy signatures recently detected approaching and disappearing at it. Those signatures had matched the same of a group of rebels who had retreated in the face of Shar Dakhan's forces.

The House could have sent military units to wipe out the rebels, but they did not have records of this particular ruin. There was the chance that it was some dark side site of value, no matter how small. There was the risk that conventional forces could disturb whatever remained there. With that in mind, the Disciples of Dakhan had been tasked with handling it.

The various members of the Disciples already otherwise engaged, Locke had decided to investigate this himself. Besides, he had been dealing with things in the cities since returning to Orian. It would be a welcome change to get out and experience a change of scenery. Besides that, the Disciples ranks included some who could become ever more dangerous with whatever ancient arcana they discovered, so Locke continued to leverage his position as their assigned leader to limit their power.

He could already feel his influence waning in that regard. Malisane and Sanguinius had been appointed to lead Shar Dakhan, and that left them with authority that theoretically superceded his own. He would have to work carefully to keep anything *too* dangerous out of their hands.

As he exited his ship and gazed over the structure, Locke let his Force senses expand to take in the surrounding area. He breathed deeply of the humid air and could already feel the dark tunic he usually wore under his robes sticking to his body. This was not ideal weather, but he had spent so much time on Aeotheran that it felt more like home than anything else - except maybe the cabin of his starship. Every breath here was full of life; the world pulsed with energy in the Force, including a slight, tainted undercurrent to it. The dark side would always be powerful here, and he doubted that would ever truly fade away - even if it wasn't once again occupied by the followers of Sadow.

He could sense several life signs as he approached the ruins. As he got closer, their feelings became more distinct. They were apprehensive, fearful - and steeled with resolve. There was something strange about it, though. He did not detect a feeling of greed, but instead, something along the lines of...protection?

*Of course, they want to protect their homes. To them, we must seem like invaders no different than the Collective.*

Finally, Locke reached a point a few hundred meters from the ruined structure's wall, then he heard a young human male sounding voice.

"Stop there!"

He stopped.

Then he found himself surrounded by six humanoids who looked like they hadn't slept in a proper bed in a week. He could detect that this was not all of them. Three of them had blaster weapons that were held trained on him.

"Hello," he said, holding his hands out in clear view. He could have his lightsaber ready in a split-second, and probably move fast enough that they could not kill him. Regardless, he saw no reason to jump straight to killing them.

"Who are you?" the presumed leader asked. "Are you with the invaders?" He was a human male, wearing a dark, grizzly semblance of a beard. He looked to be middle age, maybe around 35 standard Coruscant years.

"My name is Locke Sonjie," Locke answered plainly. "Yes, I did come here with those invaders. Who are *you*?" he asked. "I assure you, I mean you no harm," *not without reason, at least.*

"My name," the man began, then seemed to be having second thoughts "is Somonar."

Locke really doubted that was a real name, but he accepted it. "Ok Somonar, why are you here?"

"What, you're not going to try to kill us?" Somonar asked.

Shrugging, Locke spread his palms. "What do I look like, a murderous madman? Please tell me why you're here."

Somonar's answer surprised Locke. "This place has special historical significance to this world. Your kind," his eyes flickered to the lightsaber at Locke's belt, "always want to rummage through such places, take what you want, and ruin the rest."

"So you're what, archeologists? Concerned citizens?"

Somonar nodded.

*Oh great,* Locke thought. *Sang would love this.*

"I'm assuming you found some artifacts or histories here that you want to preserve. Keep them."

"I-what?" Somonar asked.

"You clearly care about them, so I have no worry that you're going to ruin anything here. I'd love to study it, just out of curiosity, but it is really not a priority. However, you will have to leave. You see, if you stay here, *someone* will remove you, whether its me or another, and then I cannot guarantee this ruin stays intact. However, if you leave, its highly unlikely to attract much attention, especially if you take any relics that aren't too heavy to move. Do you understand?"

Somonar nodded. "But why would you do this?"

"I have my reasons," Locke answered. "I don't want these things to fall into the hands of my compatriots, and if you're already holding onto them, then I don't have to. I would, however, like to offer you refuge and a place to store them." He held up a datachip. "You'll find the coordinates here, along with clearance codes to get you out of the Orian System. This will indicate that you operate as our agents. It will get you past any patrols who stop you. I assume you have ships?"

"Yes," Somonar answered. "And thank you. What do you want in return?"

"Haven't decided yet," Locke answered. "I'll come check on you when I have time. I may have you investigate some other places. For now, take what you've found and get it away from here."

*And if you get caught, I'll deny any of this ever happened.*

One more loose end cleaned up, one less ancient site Locke didn't have to worry about, he headed back to his ship after a little bit more conversation. He could rest easy knowing that this was one ancient source that would likely not lead to any mayhem. Still, he could never be sure, and he knew he was playing a dangerous game.

He did wonder what would happen if anyone in the clan discovered this and came after him. As he stepped on the bridge of the *Alpha*, he looked over the ruin and the people there and then out at the jungle and the sky above. "Let them try," he muttered, "I welcome the challenge."

Locke felt the dark side surge within him, and for once, he made no effort to suppress it.