

Planet X-37
Ancient Sith Temple
Unknown Regions
36 ABY

Ikarri wiped the sweat from his brow, the dampness on his palms making it difficult to maintain the grip on the glow-lamp he held as he traversed the ancient Sith temple. The air itself felt heavy with the stench of centuries-old decay, and an underlying feeling of malevolence almost like his presence alone had disturbed the memories held within the walls of this long-forgotten place.

With each step, it felt as though the lamp grew dimmer or the darkness grew thicker, pressing against his consciousness with the aura of the dark side permeating the entire structure. He knew his senses were on edge, though his years of exploration had given him plenty of experience navigating on instincts alone. To be within this place felt as though the Force, normally his ally in all things, felt restricted here, as if the careful warnings and intuition he'd felt his whole life had been replaced by constant sinister testing of movement at the corner of his eye.

Throughout his long life, he had delved into many ancient grottos, tombs, temples, all in the search of lost history, forgotten artifacts, or knowledge lost to the ageless wars between the Sith and Jedi. His years spent exploring within the Unknown Regions had eventually led to this particular site where he had hoped to find something of value, something that might be worth finally returning to Brotherhood space with a proper achievement.

Instead, he'd found his every step dogged by a cloying taste of fear, his mouth dry as he tried in vain to calm himself. His footsteps finally led him out of the winding passages and into a massive chamber, Sith hieroglyphs and markings covering every wall, pillar, and the majority of the floor itself. Ikarri swept the light from side to side, taking in the scenes depicted: battles long since forgotten, ancient rituals of sacrifice, and scenes even he would be hesitant to repeat when the time came to report on this place.

As he walked from scene to scene, he hesitated as the sacrificial site trembled the stone of the walls and floors groaned, as if the very architecture moved to cast him from this place. Ikarri felt his heart racing as he looked around, dust and cobwebs showering down around him. Panic surged through him as he heard stones crashing in the darkness of the chamber, the ceiling itself giving way to whatever machinations had been set loose by his presence within the chamber.

As he turned to retreat the way he'd come, breaking into a sprint and fearing his search to be in vain, he watched in stunned horror as a massive slab of rock broke free from the ceiling, falling to completely seal off the entrance to the chamber. When the stone struck the floor, he felt himself lose balance, the glow-lamp he'd been carrying scattering away, and the light snuffed out. The very weight of the shadows pressed down on him, whispers telling him to give up and accept his fate, that he would join so many others that came before him as a fresh sacrifice to this place.

With a shout of frustration and resolve, he made his way to his feet, the comfortable feel of his lightsaber in his hand, the brilliant yellow of the blade lighting the chamber around him and casting the shadows back for the moment. He could feel the despair surrounding him, weighing on his very soul as he realized he may be trapped here.

He forced himself to stop and breathe one single breath to remove the doubt, remove the fear, and focus long enough to subdue his primal instincts. With a second breath, he felt the chamber still as though

responding to his will. He reached out within the Force, taking hold of the slab of stone, bracing himself physically and mentally. He forced the entirety of his power, of his will, against the mass of the stone slab. Feeling its weight first, the task seemed impossible at first, but it began to shift, slowly grating across the floor beneath it, just large enough for him to slip through. He cursed that he couldn't finish his expedition but knew the risk outweighs any possible reward.

He slipped from the chamber, never slowing as he made his way back to the surface, feeling the first rays of the alien sun across his face he felt the shadows recede. The voices so desperate to add him to their cacophony going silent. He found himself kneeling, shaking as the adrenaline left his system and the exhaustion set in.

Though he'd failed to find what he was looking for, he knew he would record the site and this unknown planet he'd named X-37 for future research by the Academy. There were other sites waiting to be uprooted, and their treasures claimed. With a new sense of resolve, he set out to his ship, preparing for whatever comes next.