

## **Frozen Mountain-side Wastelands**

### **Planet Ilum**

**34ABY**

Cold was to be expected, although a slap of icy breeze to the face was not. Xolarin was on a mission, and he had brought all the borrowed gear he needed for survival in the frozen wastes of planets like Ilum. But even though he had been to these types of systems many times over, he had never wandered out into the wilds. It was a surprise to say the least.

A student of the Jedi ways, a pupil under Vanguard Turel, a sage and seer, and a member of Clan Odan-Urr, it was time to think about building his own lightsaber. And thus, as hundreds of thousands before him had done, he was here on Ilum to find a lightsaber crystal.

Now of course there was no map with an X marking the spot. Most trained Jedi were given hints and landing coordinates, but the hunt would be on the Jedi him- or herself. Xolarin was using his very keen senses to take him to the crystals. Caves were abound in the mountains, and he was in hot pursuit of one such cave. It called out to him.

Xolarin had done some research before leaving, something he was good at doing. He had seen some holorecords and photographs of the caves. There were few to be had, as Force Users tended not to boast about the crystals or caves. But he knew what he would find, to a degree.

Eventually he got used to the abrasive touch of Ilum's cold wind, or maybe it was his cheeks becoming numb because of it. He pressed on and soon made it to the foot of a large mountain, with a few caves just up the base. This was it.

In a way, the winds were harsher as he strode up the base of the mountain, the path becoming thinner and thinner as he walked. But instead of a whirl of random cold air it became a constant push from a single direction. The mountains funneled the winds up, down, and around them, and right up against Xolarin. Fortunately, the winds managed to push him up against the mountain so he was not threatened with being forced off the ledge. That kind of fall at this point would be difficult to survive, he surmised.

"Ah, finally," he said aloud, even though no one was there to listen. The cave entrance, the first of three, was here and Xolarin gladly stepped in. He had a small camp light that he turned on and peered around the entrance. He pulled down his scarf and opened his goggles up, now that the winds were cut down by the cave entrance. He tried to smell, but that was still difficult. He looked at the ground for any kind of prints, but that was still difficult. He looked deeper into the cave, but that was still difficult. His basic survival training was no match for this harsh environment - he was going in mostly blind.

Xolarin clipped the lantern to his belt and walked in, taking down his hood. He still had a cap on his rather buzzed head, but the winds finally died down to random wisps of cold coming from within the cave. His footsteps echoed ever so slightly as he made his way deeper into the cave.

There was still no sound or smell that indicated anyone was here, including beasts. The ice made way to rock as he got deeper, and the light from the exterior waned, causing him to rely on his lantern and his senses. But one thing was sure - he did not recognize this type of cave from his research.

After another hundred meters or so, Xolarin stopped. "This must not be right," he said aloud again. Talking to himself became a habit on his solo missions. He wanted to turn back, and prepare himself to go back out into the cold to head for the second cave. But there was a push, an urge, a nudge. Something told him to stay the course. And after all he had learned from Master Turel, he listened to that hunch and kept going.

After some exploration, he would soon discovered two major dead-ends to this cave, neither of which displayed a vast array of crystals. Without crawling or digging through rodent-sized tunnels, this was a bust. He sighed audibly, and it echoed. Only the return sound was not his sigh but another whisper of encouragement. "You need no crystal."

Xolarin stopped and looked around. Had he been followed? Was someone toying with him in this cold, damp cave? Was he beginning to hallucinate from the cold, an early indicator of hypothermia? He frantically patted himself down, trying to find his lightsaber. And, while he did manage to feel the hilt to know it was with him, his hand found something else that might be useful - the pick axe.

The axe was a tool found in almost every survival pack. In snow and ice, it could be used to burrow into the snow for shelter or to pick at the ice to climb. But it could also be used for digging. And that's exactly what he started doing. Xolarin knelt down on the ground and went right at the rocky surface, the pick axe doing a fairly decent job of displacing the rock and dirt. What he was digging for, he knew not - he was just listening to the second hunch.

Moments later, he hit something hard. It was metallic and it could easily have been a mineral of sorts, or maybe even a batch of crystals. But this was a case, buried long ago. As Xolarin pulled it out, he discovered it to be nothing special and just a small, duranium box with no ornate decorations or markings. The lock was simple and the pick axe made it even more simple.

\*clink\*

The lock, old-fashioned and not electronic, opened as it broke from blunt force, and the lid popped up a tiny bit. As Xolarin opened the lid further, an oddly-decorated cube came into view. "No..." Xolarin said in disbelief, drawing out the sound as he spoke aloud again.

A holocron! It was a brilliant sight, if worn and sort of plain looking. But if his Jedi research and learning had taught him anything, this was something special. Xolarin took off his gloves, his hands feeling the bite of the cold cave, and went for the holocron. It was not all that cold actually, and it was easy to lift from the casing.

But as soon as he had full grasp of it, the holocron began to glow. It glowed a brilliant green, the same color of his armory lightsaber and the same color as he had chosen for his own personal crest. It was amazing for sure, and this might just be more valuable to him than a lightsaber crystal. This journey turned out to be well worth it.

Xolarin wanted to investigate this thing right there and then. He needed to meditate, search through the Force and see what the holocron might tell him. The fact that it glowed, and possibly even called out to him, meant something, and he needed to find out what that was. The Jedi pupil was immediately enthralled by the device.

But as it would turn out, his investigation would have to wait. As it would turn out, he was not alone. The voices and whispers did not come from this visitor, but she was nevertheless there and knew exactly why he was there as well. "Thank you," she said boldly.

Xolarin shook, startled a bit, almost dropping the holocron. He squinted his eyes in the still-mostly-dark cave and peered out to find her, standing near where he came into this part of the cave system. He gently set the cube down into its case and the glowing stopped. Now the only glow was from his lantern and from a few diodes on her weapon pointed at him.

"For lighting the cavern?" he asked sarcastically. "Glad I could assist." Xolarin stood slowly, not sure with whom he was dealing here.

"Not so fast, Jedi," came her voice. She did not seem like a Sith, at least from what Xolarin could feel. She was definitely anxious and discontented with him, and she definitely meant him harm. He had a funny feeling that a Sith would have already attacked at this point, with deeper feelings of malice and hate. But it was hard saying.

"Close the case, and step back," she continued, waving her gun down at the case.

Xolarin closed the lid, half-risen from the ground anyways, and stepped back a step or two.

"Further," she said curtly, taking a few steps closer.

Xolarin could see her gear a bit more. If she was a Sith, she had no visible lightsaber, and she had far too much scouting and mercenary gear to be anything else than a hunter. She was likely going to make bank from this finding, especially now that it was not just another crystal.

The Jedi said nothing though and instead readied himself. This was not going to be fun. He knew he could not draw his lightsaber in time to deflect a shot, and she might have other tricks up her sleeve anyways. But the range between the two would be helpful to him as well.

Xolarin reach out his hands in a sudden movement, energies from the Force, from the living energies surrounding them in the cave, forcibly pushing outwards towards his foe. The blast of kinetic energy caught her by surprise, knocking her weapon well out of her hands and pushing her back onto the floor, off her feet.

Xolarin used the opportunity to grab his lightsaber and ignite it - the same green glow they had both seen earlier from the holocron - it was uncanny in a way.

“So we have to do this--” she tried to say something clever but Xolarin stopped her midsentence by doing the same pushing motion and sending another wave her way. It knocked her back and whatever she had grabbed from her belt fell as well.

Xolarin noticed it to be a flash grenade and he just shook his head. “Not smart,” he said, taking a leap towards the woman. It actually was a smart move on her part to try to blind him, although she should have known he could possibly knock it out of her hands just like he did her gun. But she was not a complete idiot, doing a somersault across the floor and pulling out another blaster identical to the one across the cave.

As Xolarin landed, she fired off a couple shots in desperation, both missing wildly. They were closer now and Xolarin lunged with his lightsaber, attempting to flick at her weapon or maybe even her armor. He was no killer, but he did not mind stabbing a bit if it meant disabling an enemy.

She was surprised, her eyebrows high on her face. “Nice move,” she said wryly, moving her gun up and slamming it down on Xolarin’s shoulders. He grunted as the blow punished his muscles and pinched the nerves in that area. “Mine’s better,” she said arrogantly.

Xolarin pulled out the trick that seemed to be working, extending his arm and sending a wave of energy at her again. And yet again, it knocked the blaster from her hand and sent her stumbling. Of course now she was closer to the case and that was no good. Xolarin advanced as quickly as he could, getting over to her.

The huntress pulled out a blade, some sort of vibroblade that could deflect his lightsaber, as she was able to block his blows that came at her. He was not all that skilled in melee combat, but neither was she. It was an even battle as the two exchanged strikes, blows, parries, and sizzling swings. In a matter of minutes, they were both perspiring and breathing heavier.

“I can’t let you have that, I hope you know,” said Xolarin, nodding his head at the case with the holocron.

“Sure you can. Just do it, and I’ll be on my way.” She grinned like a child with the most brilliant idea ever, knowing full well he would not agree. Xolarin could feel she was more intent on the kill than the theft at this point.

He grunted to himself, pushing her back with his physical strength. The Jedi jumped up in the air with the aid of the Force and, trying something he had never successfully done before, threw his lightsaber at her. As he came down, the blade hit hers as she successfully blocked, sending his lightsaber away from both of them. That obviously did not work, and was somewhat expected by the keen mind of Xolarin, for he landed on her with a loud thud of boots on armor. Her blade was knocked free, adding to the cluster of disarmed weapons from her in the room. He was straddling her and his knees were on his arms.

The woman tried to reach out with a hand to pull on him, but he caught it with his own. In a split-second, he used his other hand to call his hilt to him, igniting it as soon as it hit his hand. The blade went right to her throat and her arms went defenseless and limp.

“I can’t let you have it, I said.” His words were stern, as if talking to a child. And at a guess, that’s what she was compared to him. Her young, smooth skin on her face showed no signs of damage or age, probably barely half his years.

“You don’t want to kill me - you can’t.” She had learned a bit about him during their fight - clever.

“You’re right.” He disengaged the plasma beam from his blade and subsequently slammed the hilt on her pretty little head. Her body went truly limp and Xolarin sighed in relief.

The Jedi slid off her slender body and sat on the ground. He rested for a moment before gathering up all her weapons and gadgets and placing them in the hole from which he uncovered the case. He tied her up and saw that she had a survival pack with her as well, leaving it with her. She would wake up in a bit and she would live. But he had the prize, which was important.

Xolarin went back to the case and opened up the lid. He touched the holocron which then glowed green again, filling the chamber with green light and filling his heart with warmth. Xolarin would have to take this thing back to Kiasst for research, given the assault. She might not even be alone, and she could give chase soon enough.

Xolarin packed up the case and his belongings, bundling up for the trek back to his small ship. But before he left the cave there was a noise from within. It was a voice, a familiar voice, one he had not heard since he was a child. And even though it had been thirty-some years, he still recognized it.

“You have done well, my son.” It was the voice of his father. Somehow, this whole endeavor was linked to his past and his family. And yet somehow, Xolarin was not surprised by it all - such was the way of the Force. Xolarin left that cave with a grin, hidden underneath that scarf. The journey back through the freezing winds did nothing to Xolarin, for he was riding on high from the day’s events.