

BENEATH THE MINES

By Blade Ta'var

34 ABY

(Part 2 of Starfall Series after 'Buried Treasure')

Blade Ta'var leaned against the rock wall outside the entrance to the mine, already scowling at anyone with the misfortune to meet her gaze. Tightly crossed arms made her appear even more foreboding. She didn't care. She was going into a poorly lit mine that could flood at any moment with nothing more than a borrowed blaster and a hidden lightsaber.

If Emperor Xen wants these so badly, he should get them his karking self...

It all came down to the Kyber crystals. She didn't want to be on this planet, but now both her Consul and SoroSuub wanted more information on them. One wanted to expand his influence and the other wanted to make a ton of credits. Neither were going to budge and the Warrior was left to the menial task of 'checking out' the crystal's mining site. She looked up at the cloudy sky angrily and considered refusing, but it was unwise. The Emperor must not detect her disloyalty and SoroSuub still needed to believe she was holding up her side of the job per their fabricated 'contract'.

The squish of wet ground broke her brooding as her guide finally arrived. The Sullustan was provided to her by SoroSuub and didn't look too eager to enter the mine himself. He was clad in standard mining gear and held a heavy pick ax in one arm.

"We aren't going to need that, are we?" Blade asked with slight trepidation.

"You never know. Let's get this over with." Her guide grunted as he turned on his headlamp and strode into the mines. She turned on her own light and sighed before following the Sullustan into the ever growing darkness towards the crystal horde.

It was a long walk, but the Arcanist found a way to pass the time. She ran her hands along the walls every once in awhile, images of pain and suffering at times almost overwhelming. She could see shaking hands grip a pick ax as it slammed into the hard rock, despite the wielder's heavy cough. A mental image of a frail, thin teenager nursed fresh blisters, holding back tears as they ripped out crystals from the stubborn bowels of the Aesirus.

"You coming? We have to finish before high tide comes."

The Sith let her hand fall from the wall and shook herself mentally. "Of course. Sorry. Let's keep going." A new sort of anger coursed through her now, but she took measured breaths as she followed closely behind her guide. SoroSuub would pay the price for their sins.

Treated no better than slaves.

The Warrior's hand clenched into a fist for but a few moments before relaxing again. One deep breath and then another. She focused on putting one foot in front of the other, hoping her yellow eyes went away before the Sullustan checked on her again. One breath and then another. She didn't know how long they had walked but the steady rhythm of their feet against the damp underground was more than enough to regain her composure. More importantly, before she knew it they were at the mouth of a large cavern. Her guide hesitated and hung back as he gestured her forward.

Intrigued, she reached out to the Force and felt an odd sort of suffocating pressure. Curious, she walked forward into a most beautiful world full of the revered Kyber crystals, the hallmark of Jedi lightsabers. Multi-colored crystals of various sizes grew out from most surfaces in the roughly round cavern. They sparkled as the light from her lamp reflected off them, often lighting up their neighbors in a cascading rainbow of colors. She strode right into the middle of it, following the odd feeling the Force had given her earlier. The center floret of crystals was cracked, a long jagged line from its base to its tip.

"No, don't touch it!" The fear in the Sullustan's voice was palpable as his voice echoed around the cave.

Curiosity got the best of her. Reaching out to the Force, she touched her fingers to the cracked line.

Her mind exploded with mental images as clear as if it was real life. Scenes changed fluidly from one to the next as the sound of a lightsaber's *woom* intersected them.

Dark clad figures shouted as laborers built a large shrine of crystals, while an old, decrepit man watched from afar. A child looked on, deeply concerned. *Woom*. A silent, young man knelt before an ornate tomb in front of a large crystal as tears slid down his cheek. The ugly sounds of grief were suddenly interrupted by the *snap-hiss* of his lightsaber as he got up and cleaved the largest crystal in two. *Noooooooo!* Creatures scattered at his anger crashed over them. *Woom*. A harsh red lightsaber burned into the sky as dead bodies littered the ground around an older man, whose glare was almost feral. His yellow eyes stared back into Blade. He stalked toward her as she heard herself plea for mercy. *Snap-hiss*. Her scream rent the air as she felt a lightsaber slice through her body. Finally, total blackness.

The Arcanist probed further trying to get past it, but only the sharp sting of yellow eyes appeared from the darkness. She dug deeper but this time the images playing in her mind were about herself.

A family huddled in fear as they stared at her lightsaber, its red hue giving Blade's eyes a terrifying edge. Her daughter, Zoe, yelled at her as she stomped her little foot, accusing her of betrayal and calling her a nasty person. The Sith watched as the little girl cried and ran away from her towards her grandparents, who stood armed and ready to defend the small child. *Woom*. Blade wept on the floor of a shuttle, a small, roughly-hewn, sun-shaped pendant held tight in her hands as she remembered times long gone. Teardrops fell on the cold metal floor, sad lonely puddles. They would never forgive her... *Woom*.

Yellow eyes glared through the viewport of a star destroyer as the Zeltron watched her ship pummel the surface below. Just another world laid to waste at the press of a button. "Justice for the guilty, she said with satisfied nod. *Woom*. The Arcanist crouched in the middle of clearing, her red saber surrounded by the blues and greens of Jedi Knights. Several already laid dead at her feet.

"Stay away! I don't want to harm you." *Woom*.

The Sith knelt on the ground of a charred, forsaken planet and pushed her saber's emitter against her chest, thumb shaking as it hovered over the ignition switch. She was utterly alone and even the remaining Jedi would not kill her. Everyday she woke up a shunned monster and tried to take her life, only to find she couldn't. *Woom*.

In the distance, yellow eyes glared back at her from across the dark horizon as she tried to take her own life. A red lightsaber flashed out of existence as a dark clad figure chucked a Kyber crystal into the ground and fell to his knees. His yellow eyes, burdened with guilt and the crippling pain of his victims, stared into her soul once more and silently judged her. The Zeltron scrambled to her feet in fear and ran away from him, only to find he would always block her path. The Sith Warrior ran and ran and ran until she finally gave up and fell to her knees next to the man she had seen in her earlier visions.

"It's you!" The old man just stared at her, an odd mix of accusation and remorse.

"Please. Take my life. I am a monster not fit for this world." Blade begged as she bowed her head dejectedly. He simply shook his head and continued to stare. Everyday she pleaded to no avail and the endless torment continued. In frustration she chucked her lightsaber crystal to the ground, red hue of her saber disappearing into the darkness, and begged for remorse.

He smiled this time and shook his head. "Forgiveness comes with a price. If you want it that badly take my hand."

Blade grabbed the man's outstretched hand, only to try to pull it away the moment his hand clenched down. Images of her victims, both known and unknown scrolled past her field of vision and surrounded her. She yelled out desperately and yanked her hand away hard. Sweet blackness came to her as her victims finally got their revenge.

Or so she thought. Opening her eyes, she found herself back in the Kyber crystal cavern. An all too familiar jagged line in the crystal in front of her. She found herself shaking as her fists pressed against her chest, almost as if they were holding a lightsaber. The terrified Sullustan stared at her and held his pick ax defensively in front of him. The Zeltron looked around at the beautiful cavern and tried to regain her composure. Breath in.. Breath out.. Breath in.. Breath out.. Her arms dropped to her sides as she regained control. Blade looked into the main crystal and quickly scurried away backwards as she saw the piercing yellow eyes set into it like an after-image. Adrenaline rushed through her system and her heartbeats pounded one after another.

Was that my future?

"H-hey look. We really need to get going. The tides..." Her guide shakily interrupted.

She looked up at him with a glare that was accompanied by a strange urge to kill him. Time meant so little underground in the crystal cave, yet the tides made it matter.

"Let's go. I need to get away from this place." The Sith agreed, lustfully looking around the cavern one last time as she considered taking a souvenir home. She shakily got up to her feet and sighed. Only a Jedi deserved such a crystal and she was no Jedi. The Emperor may have wanted them, but she would find a way to stop him. No matter what the price. As she went to follow her Sullustan guide back out she couldn't help but remember her visions in detail, particularly her family.

Forgive me, yellow eyes. Forgive me.