

## THE LUMINOUS DEPTHS

"Tell me again why you dragged me to this sweltering hellscape?" Con'stinz Kay asked as she dodged a flying insectoid the size of her arm. Thanks to this planet's permanent cloud cover she couldn't tell if it was day or night, and as they traversed this dense rainforest she didn't really care.

Paal Skoll looked over his shoulder, meeting Con'stinz's gaze with a sly grin. "Hellscape? I'd rather be here than back on Naboo any day."

"That's only because you prefer creatures to people. Can you at least tell me what we're looking for?"

"No," Paal said. "But I'll show you. If my scans are right, it's just through this last bit of greenery."

Skoll sliced through a tangle of foliage with the light saber he scavenged from the ruins of the Jedi temple on his home world of Lothal. Con'stinz swore the plant let out a muffled scream. As they breached the edge of the forest together, they stood on the precipice of a cliff that appeared to go down for parsecs.

All they could see below them was a dense blue fog, from which creatures great and small glided in and out. To either side of them were stairs carved into the sides of the cliff that put off a natural amber luminescence. In the distance a purple river glistened as it flowed over an equally steep, equally luminous cliff.

Con'stinz raised her macrobinoculars and gasped. "That river - it's not even liquid. It must be made up of billions of tiny crystals." She lowered the binocs but her gaze never shifted. "This may be the most beautiful place I've ever seen."

"Still want to go back to Naboo?" Paal quipped. Con'stinz smiled as she playfully slapped her paramour and business partner on the shoulder. "Yes," she said. "Eventually. Not just yet, though. Do you think there's anything down there my buyers would fancy?"

Paal gestured toward the stairs. "We're not the first intelligent life on this planet, but we're the first in a long time. This place doesn't even show up on any star maps. There's no telling what we may find down there."

"No, I suppose there isn't" replied Con'stinz. "We should probably play it safe and go back to the ship. You can come back later with a bigger crew."

Paal was dejected, but he knew Con'stinz was right. As beautiful as this planet was, there were simply too many mysteries hidden in that fog.

"Hey!" Con'stinz called to Paal, pulling him out of his thoughts. "Are you coming or not?"

Paal turned to see Con'stinz looking back at him from the fourth step down, stunningly backlit by the planet's natural glow. "This," he said. "This is one of the million reasons I love you." Together, they descended the ancient stairs into the unknown.