

“Arrrrrrrrgh!”

ST-N4071 slammed her fist into the mangled durasteel bulkhead. It didn't hurt, so she punched it again. And again. And again. Anger had been her default mode since childhood. It was burned into her brain as surely as the need for food or sleep.

Eight Taldryanites had departed the Summit Guard's flagship on a shuttle bound for Kasiya. Taldryan's capital was buried. They needed help. It was the Summit Guard's job to provide it.

The storm had other plans. It flung their shuttle down against the frozen landscape as surely as the maelstrom above Exegol had smashed the *Steadfast*. ST-N4071 had once again crawled out of the wreckage to discover she was the only survivor.

The other two members of her fire team were gone. Had they burned to death? Was that why their armour was black? Was that why *her* armour was black? She tried to rub the soot off her chestplate. It stayed stuck.

Maybe she was already dead.

A roar made the Sith trooper's head snap around. Something tall, white, and shaggy barrelled toward her on all four limbs. A threat. The correct way to deal with threats was overwhelming force. ST-N4071 braced her rifle and pulled the secondary trigger. An explosive bolt struck the creature square in the chest. Blood, fire, and smoke billowed everywhere.

More importantly, her enemy stopped in its tracks. It roared again, the words garbled but clearly self-righteous in their tone. Enemies of the Sith Eternal were always like that. As the Resistance fighter lurched forward, ST-N4071 pulled the trigger again. A second explosive bolt struck home, close enough that the trooper felt the shockwave. The Resistance fighter howled in agony and turned to flee. ST-N4071 pulled the trigger a third time. More blast. More blood. Her hand moved to reload the explosive quarrel launcher before her brain fully registered that her enemy was a burned, pulverised mass on the ground.

Silence.

*Too* silent. Where was the blaster fire? Where were the explosions? What kind of battle was—

It wasn't.

Silence snapped ST-N4071—“Stone”, most people called her now—back to the frigid present. This wasn't the *Steadfast's* last stand above Exegol. It was Kasiya, in the Caelus system, years and parsecs away. It was the middle of a blizzard. It was the frigid winds, not the howling of TIEs. It was... well, it *used* to be some kind of wild beast. A wampa, maybe? She'd read about those being on Kasiya.

Stone's legs buckled as the adrenaline flooded out of her, and she unceremoniously plopped to the ground. Pain shot through her left hand when she moved to steady herself. When she looked up, the sky still roiled above her. The wind still howled. The ground where she sat still *smelled* like a starship crash, all heat and metal and burning hair and blood.

It looked like a storm. It sounded like a storm. It smelled like a storm.

It looked like Exegol. It sounded like Exegol. It smelled like Exegol.

But it didn't *feel* like Exegol.

ST-N4071 hadn't broken her hand on Exegol. Stone had broken her hand on Kasiya, from being so shaken and furious at crash-landing in a storm—similar to one on Exegol years ago, but not the *same* one—that she'd punched a bulkhead until she injured herself.

"I broke my hand punching a bulkhead," Stone forced herself to say. The sound of her voice was strange. So was the flush of heat in her cheeks, considering how cold it was. It took a moment to realise she was feeling embarrassment, and another moment to understand it was *Stone* feeling embarrassment, not ST-N4071.

She was Stone now. Not ST-N4071.

And if she didn't find shelter, her helmet HUD told her, she was going to freeze to death before Taldryan had a chance to rescue her.