**Cold Space**

Blurry eyes tried to focus, the closed again. Ears registered the sound of blaring klaxons, the fizz and crackle of electronic circuitry. Eyes opened once more and again tried to focus as smoke filled the room. Her muscles and body screamed in pain as she tried to raise herself from the floor and her head throbbed. The Aedile of House Ajunta Pall slowly looked her around her as her neck cracked. She tilted her head to one side to try to remove the knot in the muscles there and grunted as she heard another crack. The ship had taken heavy fire from the Odan-Urr forces and was slowly disintegrating as it fell towards Florrum’s atmosphere. She lifted her hand to her head and felt dampness. *That explains the foggy vision*, she thought. A large gash across her forehead steadily dripped blood down her face. And she wiped it clear, staining her hand crimson.

*Warning. Life support offline. Attempting to bypass systems for minimal operation.*

A recorded voice invaded her senses. Suddenly, she lifted from the floor as the gravitational systems were shut off.

*Life support inoperative. Please make your way to the nearest escape pods.*

The voice again. The ship was going down and nothing would stop its descent into the atmosphere of the planet below. Taranae took in her surroundings as she pushed off from a bulkhead with her legs. Bodies were strewn all around her and she had to push colleagues out of the way as she attempted to reach her only hope of immediate survival; breathing apparatus. As she neared the hatch where she knew the masks were stored, her lungs began to scream. He air was running out quickly as the ship broke apart. Her need for oxygen became more apparent as a section of the hallway behind her broke away leaving a gaping hole. As she watched, the whole aft part of the ship detached from the rest and spiralled as if in slow motion towards the waiting planet below. Opening the hatch before her, she grasped one of the breathers and clipped it to her face, taking deep breaths as her head spun and her lungs struggled to inflate. Flicking the switch, she was relieved as the much needed air rushed into her lungs and she started to inhale less deeply to conserve what little oxygen she had. Spinning around, she assessed her situation.

The aft of the ship was gone so she decided to make her way to the front hangars and see if any of the fighters stationed there were still operative; if any of them had survived the onslaught. Partly swimming through the hallways, pushing herself off from walls and bodies, she slowly made her way to the front of the ship. The hangars were only a short distance away and hopefully would be her way off the ship and down to the planet where she could rejoin the forces that had already been sent to assault the Jedi below. Rounding a corner, she pushed through a mass of bodies before finally arriving at an open space; the hangar bay. Her body shivered involuntarily and she knew that her time was growing short as her body began to feel the freezing cold of space. Her limbs began to feel sluggish, her movement slowed as she swam forwards. Fighters were stationed in the hangar as she had hoped and her hopes soared. The craft floated around the hangar as the ship fell towards the planet. As she watched, a couple of fighters floated out of the bay and into space where they joined the rest of the ship and clouds of debris in the ever-quickening descent to the atmosphere. One fighter Taranae could see was close to her than any of the others. She kicked off a wall and soared towards it; it would be her last hope. If she couldn’t get to the ship and fire up the engines quickly, she knew space would claim another victim and she would never get her chance to fight with her comrades against the Jedi on Florrum. Her breath caught in clouds of moisture a she neared the TIE fighter and she moved around to the boarding hatch.

Her numb fingers fiddled with the electronic pad to bring down the access ramp, but it seemed broken. There was no way she could board the TIE that way. She would have to use the manual controls to lower it instead. Her body began to slow as it began to freeze. Very slowly, her limbs were becoming immobile. This was her last chance to save herself before the inky blackness of space claimed her life for good. Finding the control, she grabbed it but never felt it as she pumped the handle. She was rewarded with the sight of the hatch opening on the underside, and she pulled herself towards it, using her last reserves of energy to grasp handholds on the craft and pulled herself inside, into the seat. Shivering and hardly able to control her body, Tarane feebly flicked the hatch switch, closing it behind her as the fighter slowly drifted out of the hangar under its own momentum. Now she joined the mass exodus of debris headed towards the planet. The life support activated in the craft and before long, the cabin was filled with oxygen. Taranae fumbled to take off her breather and shortly thereafter her body began to thaw. She willed it to happen faster as the craft tumbled towards the atmosphere of the planet below. If she did not regain control quickly, the ship would burn up on entry, killing her in the process. She reached forward, her arms shaking from the cold and her breath coming in short, ragged gasps. Clutching the control stick with fingers that barely registered the touch, she pulled.

As she pulled, the craft banked and started to yaw. Out of control, it spun and began to descend more rapidly as she struggled with the controls. Cursing herself and her cold-addled brain, she reached up and flicked the switch above her and the engines roared to life. Grabbing the controls with both hand s as she thawed more, she tried to regain control as the view of the planet spun past her faster and faster, the planet growing larger each time it passed. Suddenly, the TIE responded and she pulled the stick in the opposite direction, levelling it out. A few seconds later, a fiery orange glow appeared in her view screen. The ship had entered the atmosphere and she had been seconds from death. She gasped, almost sobbing with relief as she hit the comms and broadcast to the troops below.

“This is Aedile Taranae Rhode of Ajunta Pall. The ship is lost, I repeat; the ship is lost. I am Descending to landing zone alpha-5. I will rendezvous there with all units. Do you copy?”

“Roger, Blade,” came the reply. Taranae was glad to hear the voice of her Quaestor, Kalon Entar. “Good to know you survived, sorry about the ship.”

“Thanks Kalon,” she replied. “Just make sure to leave some Jedi for me will you?”

She heard a chuckle from the comms as Kalon broke contact and she smiled. Maybe it wasn’t her time to die after all.