“Pleasure doing business with you,” Jon called out, seconds before the blast from Shiro penetrated the last Collective operative’s skull. The trandoshan collapsed into the snow, a mix of blood pouring from the knife wounds Jon had inflicted on its chest. It and the oil flowing out of what used to be a pair of cybernetic lower arms pooled on the frosty ground, and the once white snow became a mixed green and black.

Jon breathed heavily, sliding his blaster back into their holsters. He glanced around at the wreckage around him. The Collective ship had been reduced to massive shards of twisted metal, impaled into the permafrost. Many of them were still smoldering, but the falling snow was quickly dousing those.

Jon heaved a sigh, and resisted the urge to collapse onto the ground. The temptation to stop, just for a moment, so he could rest was strong. Too strong. If he let himself lie down out here, he wasn’t sure he’d have the strength to get back up again. So, sluggishly, he forced one heavy leg in front of the other, and started making his way out of the crater. He needed to inform the High Council - the slaver Kraln Vegger was dead, and more importantly, Jon wasn’t. Not yet anyway.

The sun was nearly set by the time he’d reached the settlement he glimpsed during his (explosive) re-entry to the atmosphere. Jon might’ve felt relieved, if he wasn’t too cold and tired to feel, well, anything. He trudged through the darkening street, fighting to hold off the urge to lie down and sleep for just a little longer. Just a few more moments, he kept repeating to himself, a few more minutes and then you can rest. It might’ve been effective if every step didn’t feel like an eternity.

The houses, oddly, were decorated with bright lights even in the night, and bright green flora hung on their doors. Jon might’ve noticed, if he wasn’t so focused on getting somewhere he could sleep for a time.

Eventually, after what felt like countless ages in the frost and cold, Jon crossed the threshold of a building whose sign marked it as an inn. He felt the warmth of the building wash over him, and breathed in deeply. Relief washed over him, and put a bit of new life into his aching muscles. Enough to keep him from passing out on the floor, at least.

Instead, he walked up to the front desk, and threw a handful of credits in front of the bewildered looking young man stationed there.

“Room for one,” he murmured, and extended his hand out for a key. After the youth escorted him to a nearby room on the second floor, Jon walked into the room, removed only his outermost layers of clothing, and collapsed onto the bed face-first. He had just enough time to enjoy the warmth before slipping into a blissfully dreamless sleep.

A persistent knocking dragged Jon out of the blissful depths of unconsciousness, and shunted him headfirst back into the waking world. After a disorienting moment remembering where he was, he forced himself out of bed, grabbed one his few remaining knives from his discarded coat, and hid them behind his back before going to the door. Jon opened it only a crack, and peered out.

The first thing he noticed was the smell - the alluring scent of cooked food and hot caf wafted up, making him blink in surprise. The second thing was the owlish looking old woman, standing in front of a cart stacked with plated of food.

“Room service, sir?” she asked politely. Jon eyed her carefully, then the food. Slowly, he took his knife, and slid it into his belt where it would go unnoticed.

“Yes please, Ma’am.”

One reinvigorating meal later, Jon sat on the (exceptionally comfortable) single chair in his room, contemplating what to do next. His holocommunicator was badly damaged in the crash, and the snow and cold hadn’t exactly been helpful. If he was going to get in touch with his Clan, he’d need to find someone in this town who could repair it.

His mind made up, he threw on his clothes, which had dried over the night, and made his way back to the inn’s main lobby.

“Pardon me, good sir!” he called amicably to the man stationed at the main desk - an older gentleman than the gangly youth who’d been there the night before. “Perchance this settlement has someone who can repair a broken holocommunicator? My fiance and her family will no doubt want to know that I didn’t go down with my yacht!”

If the older man saw through his lie, he gave no indication of it. Instead, he politely directed Jon to a workshop run by someone named “Old Roc,” with an assurance that he could repair any piece of technology brought to him.

Jon braced himself as he crossed the threshold back into the cold… but was pleasantly surprised to not be met with a blast of frigid air. Instead, the air was cold, but tempered by the warmth of the sun overhead. The freshly fallen snow on the ground was unbroken by footsteps yet, and it glimmered in the sunlight like a field of white diamonds.

The planet wasn’t nearly as bad, Jon realized, when seen from this perspective. He shook his head. He still had a job to finish, and a contract to collect on. He could admire the landscapes later. He stepped out, and started to follow the directions given to him.

“Look out!” someone shouted, and Jon reacted by instinct, reaching for the knife hidden in his cloak. A ball of snow hit him in the face, knocking his hat askew and blinding him. His hand fumbled in his pocket, and lost its grip on the blade. He heard the sound of high pitched laughter.

“Sorry sir,” a young voice said. After Jon wiped the snow from his eyes, he could properly take in the site before him. A group of children decked head to toe in layers of scarves and cloths, from about a half dozen different species. The speaker was a togruta girl, who Jon guessed to be about six or seven. Her head tails just barely peeked out of the dozen or so layers wrapped about her.

Jon took in the frost and snow covering them, and how out of breath they looked, and put two and two together. Jon scowled.

“You think this is *funny* then?” he asked, imitating Aura’s voice whenever he did something paticularly stupid. The little ones looked positively terrified, and before anyone of them could bolt, Jon reached down to the ground, formed a ball of snow, and hurled it at the togruta girl, then repeating the action with each of her friends. The ragamuffin band scattered around the street, laughter echoing about them. Many began to return fire on the giant of a man, calling out to each other to surround him.

Before Jon knew it, he was surrounded on all side by minature attackers, each of them hurling frosty ammunition at his towering form from behind snowy fortifications they’d made. Outnumbered and under attack, he quickly threw up his hands.

“Alright, alright, I surrender! You have bested me!”

Jon walked down the street, his hands cupping a cup of hot chocolate. Old Roc, who turned out to be a cranky old ugnaught (and Jon almost couldn’t tell behind all the cybernetics that made up so much of the man’s body) had promised he could fix Jon’s holocommunicator. Just not very quickly. It seemed he would be stranded in this town for a few days yet before he was able to contact Odan-Urr and get a lift home.

Jon took in the site of the street, dressed up in various decorations for some kind of local holiday, including the bright lights and rings made from tree branches he’d seen last night, as well as bright red ribbons and bands of gold and silver strands tied to seemingly *every* available surface, and pondered if that was such a bad thing.

A group of people had gathered on one corner, singing a song in a language he didn’t know, but whose melody he picked up quickly and bagan humming along to. A few of those children he’d encountered earlier were playing games on one side of the snowy street, building vaguely humanoid figures and dressing them up with articles of clothing.

No, he decided. It wouldn’t be a bad place to wait at all.