

Emergency Muster and Innocence Lost.

“Wake up! You gotta lay off the drinks man.” The trooper yelled. ST-413 was exhausted. He slept like hell, too many drinks and this frigid environment was driving him crazy. *This definitely isn't Tatooine.* He thought to himself. The air was thin and even in the makeshift barracks room you could see your breath. “DAMN!” ST-413 flinched as his feet hit the floor. The floor sent a bite of cold up his legs. It seemed like this entire planet was just a walk in ice freezer. The other troopers laughed at him. “Buddy we learned our first day you sleep with your boots on or have them close. You are awake now though huh?” One of the troopers jabbed at him. “Yes....there is no denying it now. Dank Farrick this place sucks.” ST-413 Missed being back home on Corellia. The climates were vastly different, a bright warm sun and beautiful jungles as well as oceans. Hoth was the polar opposite. Nothing but Ice and snow with too many creatures to count that would eat you in a heartbeat.

“Hey we better get going and quickly. Topside is gonna get pissy if we aren't out there soon. At least we didn't get screwed like your buddy this morning.” The troopers were right, ST-413 needed to speed things up. They had arrived over non-working days, so everything had been pretty relaxed. A lot of the troopers spent those days celebrating a victory against the rebellion. They had sent them running all over the Galaxy and although they had taken some casualties, a wins a win. Who cared? They didn't take place in the battle anyways, that was Lord Vader's group. They got to swoop in at the end and enjoy the spoils of victory right after the Executor had made its jump. *Buddy?...hmmm.* ST-413 couldn't help wondering who they were talking about. A lot of them had been partying and playing Sabacc over the days off and ST-413 was brand new to the unit. He had got to know a few guys pretty well, but the fire water they found that the rebels had stored away made things a bit hazy.

ST-413 began to suit up, still a little hungover but not too bad. His head only ached a bit and he was a little shaky but that was that. The room though didn't help, the walls being made of ice...and the floor...and just about everything else. It was a beautiful shade of light blue though that made him feel a sense of awe. Hoth was wildly inhospitable, but it had a rugged beauty to it that he appreciated. He did NOT appreciate the cold though, or the wildlife. He was finally ready to go after donning his gear, the warmth of his body heat starting to be trapped within the suit. He quickly walked out door and began his trek down the snowy labyrinth of a base. The walls clearly marked with makeshift direction signs the team had made shortly after they arrived.

ROAAAAAAWWWWAAGG!!!

ST-413 just about jumped out of his suit quickly turning with his E-11. He went from freezing cold to immediately sweating. He was shaking looking for the monster. Only he faced a white door. “Hahahahaha! Come on man lets go!” One of the other troopers was laughing hysterically. *Ugh...damn planet. Totally forgot about this room.* ST-413 had forgotten about that room. Apparently you did NOT want to go in that room. The room was filled with Wampa's. Apparently the rebels had that room sealed off and in the chaos of the Echo Base raid, someone had actually ripped off the warning sign. Unfortunately a trooper group was about to walk in,

when the door opened a trooper was snatched, luckily one of the others was quick enough to re-seal it. This made ST-413 shudder. *I cannot imagine getting sealed into a room with one of those bloodthirsty things, much less more.* A squad of the troopers was still there. They described the horror of the screams and sounds that came out of that room. When Vader approached he simply said “Nothing you can do for him now.” ST-413 was not a fan of that part of the Empire...the sheer lack of compassion for its troopers. Some units had that issue, its what he was used to.

ST-413 arrived in the center hangar, the giant blast doors still sealed as the work day had not started yet. The Hangar was bleak and cramped. The empire had moved in tons of equipment. The Floors were covered in powdered snow, the lights there... but dim. It was bustling in the morning routine of mechanics prepping ties for patrols, troopers began to muster with their superiors, and the watches were being turned over. Everything was pretty normal. It was loud and packed to the brim with Imperial tech, fighters, and obviously Imperials themselves. “ST-413 Lets go!” The Trooper yelled at him. There was about 12 of them standing in a formation in a surprisingly empty corner of the Hangar, with one spot being noticeably vacant. That spot was his. *Shit shit shit...Im that last guy.* He quickly ran and jumped into the formation. “hahah good morning princess.” ST-785 said to him. “Good morning..” ST-413 replied. “You are going to have to set your alarm a little earlier if you are gonna party so hard the nights before workdays.” ST-785 said to him. He still could not remember too well what had happened last night. He was however about to find out.

“ATTENTION!” Cried the formation leader! The LCDR was entering at the end of the hangar. You could see the hot coffee in his hand steaming, his uniform crisply pressed, but more importantly his face pinched up. He was clearly in a mood. He slowly walked to the formation and you could feel a tension rising. He was ready to lay down some law. “It was brought to my attention....LATE...last night...that some of you were drinking. HEAVILY!” He snapped. *Oh no...what did I do...ST-413 was starting to faintly remember some things. Yikes..* he thought to himself. The LCDR continued. “You do realize the detachment OIC was out and about last night...because HE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT ALL THE NOISE WAS!!!!” The hangar went silent. Everybody had stopped what they were doing to see who royally screwed up. All eyes were on ST-413’s unit. “I STILL HAVE PEOPLE CLEANING VOMIT OFF OF THE GALLEY FLOOR! NO SURPRISE NONE OF YOU WERE THERE AS THIS MORNING MUST HAVE BEEN PRETTY DAMN HARD FOR YOU ALL HUH?!” The LCDR was red in the face, you could visibly see the steam pouring from his mouth as he spoke in the frigid room. His coffee sloshing in his cup as he barked at the unit. “DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW DISGUSTING IT IS TO CLEAN ANOTHER PERSONS VOMIT?! MUCH LESS WHEN IT IS FROZEN?!” *Oh that is absolutely nasty...* ST-413 thought to himself.

chuckle

“Excuse me?” The commander snapped his eyes widening. *Oh no....he heard someone laugh...* “Does someone find this amusing?” The LCDR snapped but calmly. “Who was it?..

Who finds this amusing because I WOULD LOVE TO KNOW WHAT I AM MISSING!” The commander looked like he was breathing fire at this point. Someone was bantha poodoo. “I swear to everyone in this unit if someone doesn’t come forward I will have you all shoveling snow on this forsaken planet. I will have you all shoveling snow and I don’t give a damn where. The entire planet will be shoveled when I am done with you. And when you are done I will have you all scrapping the Walkers that are sitting out there!”

“That’s enough...” A voice rang out in the hangar. ST-413 didn’t dare look. He kept his eyes forward but the voice sounded commanding and rather smooth. It was the detachment’s OIC and he was walking towards the formation. His white uniform firmly pressed and his appearance impeccable. He was known to be one of the rare few in the upper echelon of the Empire who showed mercy. He was respected for it by most of the people who worked for him. His peers on the other hand, did not share the same sentiment. ST-413 admired him, he was exemplary in his mind, a true leader. The OIC was smiling and chuckled softly. “LCDR, I have dealt with the problem internally. I did not want to wake you again to let you know how I rectified the issue. You will notice one of your unit members is missing this morning. I volunteered him for a special assignment. He has taken his Tauntaun and is currently doing some special business for me personally. I will accept that as payment for the issues last night. I want to be clear...I have no problem with my troopers enjoying some fire water to stay warm and entertained. I understand it is part of moral. However, if we have an incident like this again I will be forced to make the detachment...dry. Your frozen vomit worked as great penance for my troopers that are currently on restriction.”

Restriction was not something you wanted to be on, zero liberty policy and a plethora of extra duties on top of your normal obligations. They weren’t even allowed to close the doors to their rooms, constant monitoring was required and they wore a purple mark on their uniform, to wear their shame. ST-413 wanted no part of that and felt lucky the entire unit wasn’t sentenced such a horrible punishment. He could not imagine having no privacy, not like he had much to begin with. The OIC Continued “I would like you to all go throughout your day as normal and to show me just how regretful you are of your actions through exemplary performance from here on out. Now... you will all be limited to one drink this evening to help warm yourselves and that will be it until your next liberty call. Does everyone understand?” The OIC paused and looked at the group intently but firmly. “YES SIR!” the formation sounded off. “Good...LCDR Doyle you may dismiss your unit. I would like to have a conversation with you on the ISD...I have been summoned there and would like you to accompany me.” The OIC turned to LCDR Doyle awaiting a response.

“Yes sir. Absolutely. If I may address my men before I leave.” Doyle looked still very much irritated. “Of course LCDR, don’t allow me to keep you from your unit. I will be waiting at the Lambda outside.” The OIC smiled at the formation and turned to leave. He walked to the massive blast doors while the entire hangar watched. He approached the keypad and put in the code. The entire hangar was fixated on this happening as it was normally the job of a much lower ranking member to open the doors as the snow and wind would engulf the room. That particular

area would get the brunt of it due to the way the wind swirled through the ridgeline. ST-413 couldn't help but admire this...its just who the OIC was as a person. He didn't care that it was the lower man's job. He was there just like the rest of them, and his actions spoke louder than words. He was one of them, not just a dress uniform barking orders. He was an Imperial soldier stuck on a ball of ice in the outer rim...just like them.

The alarms went off and the lights flashed as the doors screeched and moaned to open. The Ice would begin to form on the doors over night so it would take particularly more time for them to open first thing in the morning. They did open though as the wind howled and the snow rushed into the room. Light piercing the cave of the hangar, you could see all of the men shield their faces and visibly in discomfort as the temperature dropped. It didn't phase the OIC though, he simply walked out to the Lambda, with an escort waiting...he turned.. waved to the hangar...and boarded.

"Now you listen here you degenerates!" LCDR Doyle growled. "If I get back here and hear from ANYONE...that you decided to do ANYTHING less than stellar...I will have your asses. There is nothing that OIC will be able to do for you. You are lucky only ONE trooper is out there in place of ALL of you. Looking at who it was he didn't deserve it at all. In fact the ONLY reason I could see him being selected was due to his strange affection for those giant snow geckos! Now I will be back...I better not hear a word. AND...to whoever laughed...you are so lucky that the OIC interfered. You have all been let off the hook...You are dismissed."

ST-413 felt a breath of relief. He was about to pass out due to being in attention for so long and he had stupidly locked his knees. The hangar was completely back to normal, machines buzzed, wrenches turned, and the Tie engine's began to howl as their preflight's were coming to a close. "You good buddy?" ST-785 looked over at him. "You know you are lucky...that Trooper that was selected really helped you out last night. He kept you out of the O club room when you wanted to fight that LT who beat you in sabacc." ST-413 was bewildered...*did I get that bad last night? Who was this guy?* He felt guilt rush over him...this trooper was just trying to help him and then he was the unlucky one selected to do some sort of assignment for the OIC. "Who was he? I feel like a real nerfherder." ST-413 looked down dejectedly. "You know to be honest I don't even remember his name or his number. We had just met him and he has been here since the start if I remember correctly...but I really cannot for the life of me remember." ST-785 replied. *Huh....well when he gets back I will have to thank him. Will probably give him some of my rations and my one firewater as penance.*

ST-413 and 785 hurried out of the hangar. The Temperatures were dropping rapidly with the doors being open. In the suits it was definitely survivable...but in no way comfortable. The ties were getting ready to launch and they needed to get started on their patrols of the base. They walked back down the passageway, its walls beautiful and almost transparent due to the ice being so thin and pure. You couldn't get too comfortable admiring Hoth's appearance though as they got deeper into the base...too many things could be waiting for you . Many of these make shift passageways connected to tunnel systems that went all over the ridgeline. Some of the

detachments navigators had actually been attacked by ice spiders while exploring and mapping one of the deeper ones. It was at that time the OIC ordered all exploration to stop for now and for heavy blasters to be mounted at the ends of different passageways. It gave ST-413 the chills thinking about those creepy crawlies coming into the barracks room. What a horrible way to go, frozen in some ice web...your body being used to feed the colony of eight legged monstrosities.

They approached the watch log at the end of the hallway, the watch officer sitting quietly next to a transmitter. He looked bored out of his mind as his head rested on his hand. He had his helmet on...and he wasn't really moving. "Dude...is he asleep?" ST-785 asked 413. "Im not sure...?" They approached the trooper slowly and quietly...they stopped and listened. Faintly you could hear the faint crackling snores coming from his helmet. "Oh my...he is...well better us finding him than Doyle!...watch this.." 785 approached the table slowly and methodically. He bent over almost helmet to helmet with the watch officer.

BAM!

"ATTENTION! YOU BETTER GET YOUR ASS UP RIGHT NOW! I WILL HAVE YOUR ASS!" ST-785 slapped the hand out from under the watch officers head. His helmet smacked the desk loudly. The Officer sprang to attention "Apologies sir! It won't happen again sir! This was unacceptable behavior!"

"Ahahahahaha good lord Lt you cant be doing that!" 785 responded. The Lt, now realizing it was not a superior, was embarrassed and a bit agitated. "Oh come on man! You can't do that to me! I am gonna have to change my suit after this. I may have shit myself!" The Lt was laughing. ST-413 was surprised to see such camaraderie between the enlisted and officer's. This was not something he was used to. "Hey this is one of our newer guys! Meet ST-413. Cool guy and hell of a sabacc player!" ST-785 was introducing ST-413 to the Lt. "Good morning sir!" ST-413 said timidly. It was clear that he was uncomfortable through his tone of voice. He was not sure what to expect with this interaction. "Relax their trooper. We are all good here. I am just relieved its you guys! ST-413 I swear if you tell anyone about this you are dead meat you hear?" ST-413 didn't say a word...he wasn't sure how to respond...the silent pause began to drag out. "...yes sir." ST-413 replied softly. "Hey now! I am only joking! Welcome to the Unit! I am actually your Div.-O so good to put a name to face...well helmet I should say...but really don't tell anyone I fell asleep on watch please!" The Officer was laughing. ST-413 felt a little bit of relief. This unit was turning out to be pretty cool. A breathe of fresh air for him.

"You guys know where you are heading for your patrols?" The Lt asked them both. "No actually this place is a damn maze. No idea what the rebels saw in this place." ST-785 replied. "You got that right. Rebel scum made a little womp rat nest in some ice it would seem. Probably why the wildlife didn't try to kill them all hahaha" The Lt replied. ST-413 didn't say much. He hadn't felt like he had connected enough yet to start contributing to the banter. He was still feeling people out. This whole dynamic was very new to him and he was going to wait a bit longer to see just how far this sort of behavior goes.

“Well its this way.” The Lt pointed at a map on the table to a point marked in red. “Wow that’s pretty far. I haven’t been down there yet. Anything to watch out for?” ST-785 asked. “Well actually there have been some spider sightings. Surprisingly enough though we have not had any incidents. Just fire the heavy blaster and they tend to run.” The Lt looked over at ST-413. “You man that gun at all times. You guys can talk joke around and be pretty lax...but you make sure someone is on it at all times.” The Lt’s voice had gotten a bit more serious. “Yes sir.” ST-413 replied. “Hey...relax! A simple you got it will suffice. No need to be so tense. We all got each other’s backs out here.” ST-413 wasn’t sure what to say. “Thank you Lt! We will see you later tonight!” ST-785 interjected. They began to walk away from the table and down the corridors to their watch post.

The walk was long and it seemed to get colder with every step. The lighting became worse and worse. The sound of the wind slowly getting lower with every step close to their post. It was starting to get very dim and the silence....growing. It gave ST-413 the creeps. It was as if time was stopping, no movement or ambient noise could really be heard. Only every once in a while would you hear the cracking and shifting of ice...but the cracking would subside... highlighting the deafening silence. ST-413 could hear his respirator as well as ST-785’s and that was it. “Man this place is spooky huh?” ST-785 broke the silence. ST-413 started to feel a bit more comfortable... “Yeah...definitely. I mean its like were in another world in here.” ST-413 retorted. They were speaking softly for some reason...almost felt like they had to. “Well I brought a sabacc deck if you wana play. It helps kill the time. Besides this passageway is long. We are going to see something coming a mile away.” ST-785 pulled the deck out of his suit pocket. He brushed some frost away and got down on one knee to lay the deck out. “You game or what?” ST-785 asked again. “Sure.” ST-413 stopped before he crouched to look at their corridor. Dimly lit in the shape of a T. A long corridor running perpendicular to theirs and their blaster at the base of the T shape. The place almost made ST-413 feel claustrophobic...but he took a deep breathe and sat down to play.

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Hours had passed with little to no movement. They had one scare though...At one point they got movement down the hall and ST-413 jumped on the Heavy blaster...only to see it was a Hoth Hog family walking at the end of the hallway. A mother and two piglets simply minding their own business. They stopped and looked at the troopers. “Shoot It!!! That is good eating man! We would be heroes in the galley!” ST-785 whispered firmly. ST-413 looked at the family of Hogs, the piglets were close to the mother and staring at them at the intersection almost curious as to what the troopers were. “Do it man! Take it out!” ST-413 was frozen...not out of fear...but in pressure. Its true he would be regarded as a hero for securing better food for the guys...but...he couldn’t help but look at the family and feel compassion. The piglets were so small and almost glued to their mother’s side looking to her for guidance. He remembered what it was like to have a mother...and how much he missed his. It was a moment he was not expecting to have. He remembered on Correllia hiking through the jungles with his mom. He

would look at her that way as a child, she was his protector.

PEWWM

A blaster shot broke the silence.

Sqqqquaaaaa!!!

ST-785 had shot the mother...she screamed and dropped. ST-413 was mortified. He felt a pain welling up in his throat...he wanted them to go on their way and they were gunned down...

“ALRIGHT!!! Were gonna eat good tonight man!” ST-785 cheered. He began to trot down to the body. ST-413 followed close behind still feeling this sensation of pain. They arrived at the mother. She was dead...mouth open and eyes lifeless. Not a sound to be heard in the corridor other than the respirators on both troopers...until...

Oink oink....squee

The babies walked from behind their mother. The piglets staring at their mother's body as it lay lifeless... there faint grunts and sounds breaking the silence. They nudged their mother's body softly awaiting a response. Then they turned to face the alien species they had never seen before...the troopers. ST-413 dropped to one knee in front of the babies...his heart was broken. The tears welled in his eyes under his helmet, trying the best he could to keep his breathing under control in an attempt to hide it from ST-785. He felt as if he had just robbed these pigs of their innocence, he had taken their mother. “Aww man...oh no no no. I didn't see the piglets. This feels bad.” ST-785 said softly...you could feel his voice go flat as he had realized what had happened. It was then one of the piglets approached ST-413. It grunted softly and looked at him in awe. He reached out to pick up the piglet. It cowered for a moment and then allowed him to hold it. That was it for ST-413.

“Hey man are you okay? Are you crying?” ST-785 broke the silence. ST-413 didn't respond. He was staring at this little piglet in his hands while the other sat at his feet. The sheer innocence was gut wrenching to him. They were so little they couldn't even comprehend what had happened to them or their mother. “Dude...I don't know what to say.” ST-785's helmet was low as if he couldn't even look at them. The Piglet in ST-413's hand began to rest its head on his arm...displaying a complete trust. ST-413 removed his helmet. He felt like he couldn't breathe and it was too late anyways. ST-785 already knew that he was crying. “Hey man you start crying like that and I am gonna do it too.” ST-785 said calmly but you could hear his voice choking up. He was starting to experience the lump in his throat.

Bzzz bzzz bzzz

ST-785's transmitter had just gone off. A voice came through "Hey guys...we have a problem. We need everyone back here right now. Emergency muster has been declared. How copy?"

There was a long pause....

"Emergency muster...all units to the hangar immediately this is detachment wide. How copy?"

ST-785 looked at ST-413 who was still holding the piglet. He coughed for a moment to clear his throat and to snap out of his emotional state. "This is 785...im with 413. We copy. Uhm we have a bit of a situation here..."

The voice crackled back "What's the issue? Unless you don't have legs you need to get here now."

ST-785 took a moment... "We uhhh... we were able to down one of these Hoth Hogs and will need help carrying it to the galley.."

The voice snapped back immediately "I don't really care! You can come back for it. Get your asses here now." ST-785 looked at ST-413...ST-413 felt a sense of panic and pain overwhelm him. They were about to have to leave the piglets by their dead mother...and would have to come back for them. "Dude we cannot just leave them here and you know it!" ST-413 had tears welling in his eyes. "We have to...we have to go now man." ST-785 responded... voice was firm but his eyes never left the ground. "SO WE JUST LEAVE THEM HERE?!" ST-413 felt desperation and anger. His fist clenching in his right hand...his grip tightening around the piglet. "Okay man so what the hell are we gonna do with them then?! You gonna keep em?! Yeah let me know how that works out for you dude!" ST yelled back at him. The piglets flinched and the one at ST-785's feet scurried back. ST-785 took a deep breath... "Im so sorry...If I could go back and do it again I wouldn't have shot them. You know damn well we can't do anything for them. Its an unfortunate truth...but it is what it is. Now put the pig down. We will come back after this all-hands muster and figure out what to do."

ST-413 was emotional...but he knew his friend was right. He couldn't take them...especially not to a muster. It would be a for sure death sentence for them right there. Every ounce of him wanted to keep them safe...but he knew that was not going to work. He slowly crouched down to place the piglet next to its sibling. It plopped down and ran over to its sibling and they approached the corpse of their mother again. ST-413 fought back more tears as he put his helmet back on and turned his back on the helpless animals. They began their slow and agonizing walk back to the hangar. ST-413 turned back to see them one more time before he exited the hallway...the body of the mother still lifeless...and two little faces peaking over the body. It a huge blow in the gut of ST-413...and ST-785 didn't say a word...the entire walk back.

The whole walk ST-413 had a rush of memories of his own mother. It was an emotional roller coaster. No homesickness...he knew his mother was not home. She would never be there again. *A bad time to visit Alderaan...*

They arrived at the Hangar...it was bustling with noise, talking and was packed to the very brim. Something happened and it seemed pretty serious. The OIC was already back and so was LCDR Doyle. They were both in front of the massive Imperial formation. The OIC looked concerned and oddly enough LCDR Doyle looked annoyed....

“Get over here guys!” One of the troopers from the formation yelled at them. They jogged over to their unit. “Did you guys hear? There is going to be a massive search effort tomorrow!” ST-413 was still in a daze due to the pigs and what he had just seen. He really was not interested in the least.

“ATTENTION!” Everyone in the room snapped to attention and fell in to formation. ST-413 almost didn't do it fast enough due to his mental state. He was just going through the motions. What really ate him up inside was the fact that it was all over some pigs. *Who cares...they are just animals...why do I care like this. Im so stupid.* He thought to himself. Just then the OIC grabbed the intercom device to speak so everyone could hear him.

“Good evening detachment. I appreciate the hustle getting here and on such short notice...but we have a situation that has developed. One of your brothers is missing at the moment. Now I know normal protocol would be to declare them missing in action but we all know that's not how I run things. We are a family.” ST-413 couldn't believe what he was hearing. Did he just refer to them all as family? *What a joke...the Empire's Officer calling us family...he was amused.* The OIC continued. “Normally my peers would dismiss this sort of thing...and against some of their advice...I am organizing a search party. I don't want to hear a word in the Officer's Club about what some of you may think of my choices. I answer to the Admiral...none of you do. I determine what I want to use our supplies and manpower for. If the Admiral has questions then I will answer them and ultimately answer FOR them. Now... the missing person is none other than FO-099...the one I assigned this morning to take his Tauntaun and search a sector.” *Wait...was that the guy that helped me last night??* “The watch officer received the word from our Tie pilots. They received a distress call in sector 28B. After checking the Tauntaun stables....I immediately knew who it was. I will be working this evening on a plan to comb the area thoroughly. I am not sure if we will find him dead or alive...or if we will at all. We all know Hoth is dangerous and a brutal planet that will take what it want's...however I also know that if that was me or my son or daughter...I would want them found. FO-099 was performing his duty...he has been Loyal...and we reward loyalty amongst my ranks. I expect maximum effort from you all. We are a family here and we will never leave our members behind. You are dismissed. Please meet with your Division Commanders for further instruction. This begins first thing in the morning and please remember that if this was ANY one of you...I would do the same. Lets find our trooper and get him home. He will be in my thoughts this

evening...as he should be in all of yours...he is resourceful and we can only hope he survives the night. Now please. Fallout.”

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