

Ice and Stone

Larta clung to the steering wheel as if it could deliver oxygen into her empty lungs. A ridiculous notion. That function had gone offline over half an hour ago. Her ship seemed to hang in the black void, despite the speed at which she was flying. Larta reached 1000 in her head and began the counting exercise again. If she could just reach the air bubble and breathe, she might live. Noone would try to kill her. Everyone was dead. A rush of twisted glee washed over her. “How odd.” she thought. “That experiment really did make me sadistic.” But another wave of dizziness forced her to again focus on staying alive.

A flash of color outside drew her attention. Another ship was pursuing her. So they weren't all dead. How intriguing. Closing her eyes, she willed her heart to freeze over. Emotional impulses could be fatal here. Opening her now completely white eyes, she released the steering wheel. Autocorrect should save her from all but the most accurate shots. Larta powered on the guns and reached for her blade.

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Uncut gemstones crusted around Piet's fingers as they clenched the steering wheel. Lightning flashed behind his eyes as he remembered Kyan's broken corpse, Jett's terror as she fell, and his anguish as he abandoned them. Larta would pay.

Piet fired at her, the blast of white-hot energy shooting through the pitch-black space between them. She dodged just out of the way, and his shot flew past her. His hands trembled as he looked at her ship. Anger, grief, and hesitation filled him to bursting. But strengthening his resolve, he began closing the distance between them.

She continued to half-heartedly dodge as he fired at her. Few shots were fired in return. This wasn't like Larta, even as changed as she was. Dodging an automated blast, he rolled to fly alongside her.

Confused, he glanced at her face. She had frozen over. That made even less sense. If she wasn't being influenced by emotion, why was she acting oddly? Her unfeeling eyes stared straight forward and he could almost feel the cold, untainted logic emanating from her. It replaced any human feeling she possessed.

He barely had time to notice her hand on her airlock before his ship hit an air pocket. Bright orange flames exploded into existence around his ship and he slowed drastically from the friction of the air on his fast-moving vehicle.

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Larta jumped through her ship's airlock to float inside the bubble of air, breathing heavily. A little color leaked into her irises as she felt a surge of relief. But she quickly froze over, her heart and expression hardening as the color and emotion faded away.

Focusing, she charged her sword and pointed it towards Piet's ship. Piet scrambled to fly out of the way; but his ship was damaged from suddenly entering the air pocket, and Larta severed the back half using the beam of energy that shot from her blade.

Leaping off pieces of debris, Larta reached the ship and propelled herself through the newly created opening towards Piet. He ducked under her blade, now drained of its energy, as she swung the swordlike weapon. It wasn't as formidable uncharged, but it was still a sharp piece of metal.

Ripping his hands free of the steering wheel, Piet paused as the chunks of crystal growing there began glowing and orbiting his hands. He breathed in, feeling his connection to them. Larta raised her weapon, knowing her chances of dying had just risen dramatically.

“Well Piet,” she said coldly, “you’ve decided to kill me.”

“You don’t deserve to call me by that name.” He growled, “Larta died in that experiment, and you, merely a twisted husk of her, will die as well.”

“Very well then, Tempest Stone. Let us fight.”

He attacked, firing chunks of crystal towards her. But she was prepared, and accurately slashed the shards out of the air. Every attack he threw at her, she cut down with cool, calculated, accuracy. Then she struck back. Summoning the crystals as quickly as he could, Piet frantically defended himself. He was losing ground quickly.

So he said the name. The one thing that could cut through Larta’s frozen defense. The one thing they’d promised never to say.

Her scream of anguish drowned out all else.

And with his tears dripping from it, one of Piet’s crystals found Larta’s heart. The tears that accompanied the name of their mother.