

Star Wars: Imperial Treachery

Chapter 2

Celeste ran as fast as she could to the dock. She had overslept and was now paying the price. They were now only a day behind the New Republic's envoy and if she didn't hurry her ass onto her ship, they could just kiss the mission, the ship *and* their jobs good-bye. And knowing Isard, they could also lose their lives.

"Celeste!" Echon screamed. Celeste turned around to see Echon and Aurea running towards her. She flashed a big smile as he approached.

"Thank you," she said.

"I couldn't miss your big day," he replied as he looked at the corvette in awe. He had never seen one in perfect condition. The paint was as white as a pearl, and the trim was as green as an emerald. "How'd you keep it in such nice condition?" He asked Celeste as they walked towards it.

"I didn't," Celeste answered. "The Empire built it and gave it to me. I haven't been sitting on my ass for the past five years."

"Is that another jab at me?" Echon asked. "Come on Celeste, you know the Galactic guard fought in *some* battles."

"You're just too paranoid," Celeste said as she smiled. "I never said anything of the kind." Echon smiled back. Suddenly, he felt a tug at his sleeve. He turned his head to see Aurea standing behind him.

"Why am I going?" She asked with displeasure.

"I can't just leave you behind," he answered. "Besides, nothing dangerous is going to happen," he turned towards Celeste. "Nothing *is* going to happen, right?"

"Of course not," she answered. She continued towards the *Frayed Hunter* and stopped at the loading ramp. She quickly thought about the mission once more. She had read the reports of the Empire's previous encounter with those barbarians and it had sent chills down her spine once more. *Of course* it was going to be dangerous.

"Is something wrong?" Echon asked as he snuck up behind her. She spun around with her eyes wide open from shock.

"She's lying to you," Aurea said.

"I am not," Celeste lied, "honest. I'm just a little ... on edge, that's all."

“Then what’s got you on edge?” Echon asked. He was clearly concerned. He wasn’t just about to let Aurea onto that ship. Of course she didn’t want to go, but he wasn’t just about to leave her in the middle of a former Imperial planet. If they were to find out what she was ... just the thought was too much for him.

“It’s nothing that concerns you anymore,” Celeste answered, “if you had remained with the Empire, it might have, but anyways are you two going to get on or what?” Echon stood there for a moment and contemplated his next move. He sighed, grabbed Aurea by the hand and dragged her into the ship. The ramp closed behind them, sealing them inside.

Once inside, Echon began to look around and admired the pearl-white walls of the ship. Aurea stayed close to his side and looked around attentively. Celeste turned around and examined the two. She studied Aurea and noted how she gripped Echon’s hand like a child and how her lip quivered in fear, as if something about the ship scared her. Her eyes however continued to look forward the entire time. They never moved once, as if they were dead, yet she showed no signs of blindness. It confused Celeste.

“You mind showing us to our rooms?” Echon asked.

“Oh, of course!” Celeste said as she snapped back to reality. She turned around and started to walk down the hall to where the crew’s quarters were located. As Echon began to follow, Aurea tugged on his arm. Echon tilted his head to look at her, even though she didn’t look back at him.

“She was staring at me,” Aurea said as she continued to stare blankly ahead. “I think she knows.”

“Nonsense,” Echon replied.

“She was looking at my eyes,” Aurea then said.

“Well, maybe if you moved them a little, people wouldn’t stare as much,” Echon suggested. Aurea only responded with a pout.

Celeste had stopped a few feet ahead of them, just within earshot to overhear the conversation. Aurea’s little observation of her was intriguing. Celeste figured that Echon would answer any question about the girl’s eyesight later. “You guys coming?” she asked. Echon quickly picked up the pace and followed her.

They strolled about the halls, and walked past various soldiers hard at work on the ship. Suddenly, the ship rumbled and the three began to feel a lot of weight push down on them. “It seems like they started the lift-off without me,” Celeste mentioned as the weight got heavier and heavier. Then, as soon as the weight had appeared, it suddenly disappeared, which signaled that they had left Eriadu. After the little interruption, Celeste continued to trek to the crew’s quarters,

which didn't take that long, the size of the ship was smaller than the Empire's own ships. "Here you are," Celeste said as they finally approached a door, "one officer's quarters."

"Just one?" Echon asked.

"This ship was only installed with two," she explained, "and the other one belongs to Zenete, my second-in-command. However," she said as she crossed her arms. "If this will be a problem, one of you could stay with the rest of the crew."

"No, its fine," Echon assured her, "I was just a little surprising." He then approached the door and pressed the button beside it. He then stepped inside with Aurea in tow. Celeste watched as the door shut behind them. She then turned around and began her trek to the cockpit.

Echon looked around the cabin; it had a table, a single bed, a couch and a door leading to the refresher. "Looks homely," Echon mentioned as Aurea took a deep breath through her nose.

"At least it's not dusty," Aurea commented. Echon walked towards the bed and placed his bag of items on it. He then opened up the bag, began to rummage through it and removed his blasters, a second uniform and some casual wear. He stopped when he pulled out his old hat and admired it for a second. When he placed it on his head he realized that he had forgotten to bathe the day before as the hat seemed to slide against the grease in his hair. He then removed the hat, grabbed his casual clothes, and headed towards the refresher. He pressed the "close" button and turned to face Aurea. She was busy sorting through her own belongings to notice him.

He sighed with relief once the door had shut, placed his clothes on the counter of the refresher and opened the shower. His eyes widened as he looked inside at an actual water shower. Echon was no stranger to one. He had used one for most of life, his house on Eriadu and the Imperial resort on Feriae. He turned the knob, and heard that familiar rush of water come out of the spout. He then removed his uniform and stepped into the shower.

Celeste sat in her chair and stared blankly at the sealed-off windows, which prevented the crew from staring into hyperspace and getting hyper-rapture. It would take about a day for the ship to reach the *No Fly Zone*, and at least three hours to convert the data codes for the ship from Imperial to New Republic. It was anybody's guess what would happen next. "How are things holding up?" she asked Evan, who was busy at his post.

"Pretty well, considering this is her second jump," Evan answered. He scratched his chin as he stared at his screen. "Who did you bring on board?" He asked.

"He's an old friend of mine," she answered, "Echon Tarkin."

"T-Tarkin?" he stuttered, surprised at the mention of the name. "But I thought he died at Endor!"

“Guess not,” Celeste said. “He surprised me as well.”

“Wow,” Evan said, “and to think he was dead for so long.” He began to resume his work, but quickly stopped. “Why’s he here?” He asked.

“I asked him,” she answered.

“You just asked?” He replied in surprise. “You two must have been pretty close for him to join this mission.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Celeste looked back to the sealed windows with heaviness in her heart. She still had yet to tell Echon where they were going.

“Who was the girl?” Evan then asked.

“I don’t know,” Celeste answered as she stood up. “I think I’ll go find out.”

“I’ll be sure to report anything,” Evan said as she walked past him.

Echon stepped out of the refresher as he continued to dry his hair with a towel. He tossed the towel over his shoulder, adjusted his light-brown shirt, and faced the table, where Aurea sat with her face buried within a book. Echon took a few steps towards the table.

“Why did you really take me?” Aurea asked Echon, which stopped him in his tracks.

“Like I said before, I can’t leave you behind,” Echon answered.

“Just because you flicker doesn’t mean I can’t tell you’re lying,” Aurea retorted. Echon looked down at his feet, trying to hide embarrassment. “It’s because of what I saw when I first saw you, isn’t it?” She then asked as she flipped through the pages of her book. “In time the echo within you will become a grand orchestra and with it, you shall overcome the next rebellion,” she recited from a page. Echon looked back at her, who was still staring at the book. Aurea’s habit of never looking at people when she talked to them was one of the things that irked him.

“You got me,” Echon replied. “But it makes sense, doesn’t it?” he then asked in an attempt to justify his actions. “We’re attempting to destroy the New Republic!”

“*You’re* attempting it, not me,” Aurea interrupted. “I don’t to have anything to do with this,” suddenly, she turned her head towards the door. “Your friend is coming.” She said as the door opened and Celeste stepped in.

“Hey Echon,” Celeste greeted. She then walked over to Aurea and knelt down in front of her so their faces were at the same height. “We never really got a chance to meet. My name is-”

“Celeste,” Aurea interrupted.

“That it is,” Celeste said. “And you are?”

“Aurea,” Aurea answered dully, “Aurea Hali.” She then grabbed a pair of clothes on the table and walked towards the refresher.

“Cute kid,” Celeste commented as the door shut. She stood back up and faced Echon once more. “How old is she, ten, eleven?”

“Twelve.” Echon replied.

“Where’d you find her?” She then asked.

“Cerea,” Echon answered, “her parents were murdered by bounty hunters. I arrived right as they tried to take her, took one of them out and the other escaped.”

“And you just took her in?” Celeste inquired. “I never thought you to be the caring type.”

“They said the same thing about my father.” Echon replied. “How much longer until we reach wherever it is we’re going?” he asked.

“Oh, it won’t be for much longer,” Celeste answered, “about less than a day.”

“That’s good at least,” Echon commented.

“Why did they try to kidnap her?” Celeste asked. Echon ignored the question and faced the door to the refresher.

“Strange,” he said, “I don’t hear any water running.”

“Think she’s spying on us?” Celeste suggested jokingly.

On the other side of the door, Aurea stood in the middle of the room and observed Echon and Celeste as they talked. Things like walls and doors were nothing to her, she could see *everything*. Aurea may have appeared human, but she was in fact, a Miraluka. Miraluka were born without physical sight. Instead, they relied on the Force to see for them. Her eyesight was restricted to three colors: red, blue and white. The world around her was almost semi-transparent, and it allowed her to see those three colors on the people and various creatures around her. It was known by her people as an individual’s aura and each pertained to their alignment: red for those who used, as her people said, unjust force to further their own greed, blue for those that made sacrifices to protect those close to them. White was for in-between, where a majority of individuals lied in the spectrum. Every living creature followed this rule, the only exception being droids and, well, Echon.

Unlike other living creatures, Echon's aura was almost non-existent, save for a faint flicker, an echo, you could call it. It was upon seeing Echon that Aurea had first seen the future. Even for her people, farseeing was a rarity. Her vision showed her that one day, that echo within Echon would become a fully fledged aura, and with the power that came with it, he would destroy the next threat to rebel against the galaxy. She didn't know what it meant, but to Echon, it meant that he would defeat the New Republic and bring the tyrannical Empire that had forced her family into hiding back to power. Aurea had told Echon that she only followed him to see if her vision would come true or not, yet the truth was that she had nowhere else to go. She noticed that Echon and Celeste had stopped talking and realized that Echon knew what she was doing. She cursed herself under her breath as Echon approached the door to the refresher.

"Why don't you stop spying on us and start washing up?" Echon said as he pounded on the door. The sound of running water began to come from behind the door soon after. He turned back around and grinned at Celeste. "That girl always thinks she can fool me." He commented.

"She does this often?" Celeste asked.

"Only to people she doesn't trust." Echon answered. "Can't blame her though, it's tough to trust people in this galaxy."

"True." Celeste said ironically. She looked around the room and noticed a book on the table. "Wow, I haven't seen a book in ages." She said as she picked the book up. It had an ornate design on the cover. She grasped the edge of the cover and opened the book, the spine cracking as it revealed its contents. She was surprised when she found blank pages staring back at her.

"I don't get it either." Echon said after he noticed Celeste's confusion. "I'm guessing it belonged to her parents." Celeste put the book back down and approached the door to the hallway.

"I need to get back." She said. "Get some rest. You're going to need plenty of strength."

"This mission is starting to sound like fun." Echon replied as Celeste left the room. Echon stood still for a moment, and then picked up Aurea's book. He remembered the two of them returning to her home on Cerea. As Echon checked the bodies of her parents, Aurea had walked farther inside. When she returned, she held the book in her arms and asked if she could join him ...

"Don't touch my book!" Aurea screamed as she exited the refresher. She snatched the book from Echon's hands and began to wipe the fingerprints from the cover.

"You don't need to get so angry," Echon said.

"This book is the lifeblood of my family," Aurea explained, "If this is stolen or ruined, my family dies with it." She flipped through the empty pages as if there was information stored

on it. She reached into her bag and pulled out a slender crystal and began to write upon a page. Echon observed Aurea's writing, but still saw nothing on the page. "My mother's was stolen," Aurea commented. "My father said she had to rewrite the whole entire thing."

"That had to have been tough." Echon said as he noticed the thickness of the book. Aurea ignored his comment as she flipped through the book once more, closed it and placed it back in her bag.

Echon looked over at the clock, and noticed the time, it had gotten pretty late. He yawned and looked towards the bed and figured that it was a lot more comfortable than the couch. He looked towards Aurea, who was busy packing her old clothes into her bag. As much as he wanted to have a comfortable night's sleep, he walked over to the couch and lay down on it instead. "Take it." He offered to Aurea. She turned around, confused, but realized what he meant when she noticed him on the couch. She walked over to the bed and lay down. Echon made a mental note of his surroundings. The door out was in the direction of his feet, the refresher was to the right of him, with the table about three feet in between and the bed was in the direction of his head. He then reached for the button to turn off the lights, pressed it and darkness fill the room.

"Good night." Aurea said.

"Good night." Echon said as he closed his eyes and let sleep overtake him.

Celeste had been unable to sleep at all. She looked at the clock on the wall in front of her and realized that it was soon time to fully begin the mission. She climbed out of her bed and walked over to the New Republic uniform by the mirror. She slipped the uniform on, looked at it in the mirror, made a few adjustments and walked out of her room towards the cockpit. She entered the cockpit and observed the franticness of the crew as they struggled to rewrite all of the ships data. Apparently three hours hadn't been enough. They were running out of time and if they didn't make the ship appear to be a part of the incoming New Republic fleet, the mission most likely would be a failure before it even began. Evan approached her as she sat in her chair. "Captain," Evan said in a worried tone, "we are ninety percent complete with the data rewrite." Celeste shifted in her seat.

"How much longer until we exit hyperspace?" Celeste asked.

"It should be any minute now," Evan answered. A shiver went down Celeste's spine. If they exited hyperspace into an ambush or a squad of fighters, and their codes still had Empire data, the New Republic would not just be the only one in danger.

"Are the hail codes ready at least?" she asked. Evan nodded. She sighed with relief. At least they would think they were the Republic for a while.

“We’re exiting hyperspace now,” The pilot informed as the ship began to slow down. The shields on the windows soon slid away and revealed a planet inching closer to them. The cockpit went silent, as if they waited for something. Evan approached his console and flashed the numbers “93” to Celeste with his hands. As they approached the planet, Celeste could start to hear the small whispers of her crew. Evan flashed the numbers “95” to her.

“I’ve got two unknown fighters approaching!” the radar controller screamed. Celeste observed as two ships flew towards them. They were silver and were slender in shape. The cockpits appeared to look like the head of a creature, a Krayt dragon perhaps. Each ship had two cannons protruding from the bottom of the ship. The wings stretched out from the top and had what looked like missiles attached underneath them. The overall appearance resembled a dragon.

“Keep calm,” Celeste ordered to her crew. She knew they were on the verge of a panic attack, but she couldn’t afford to lose control of the situation at hand. She swallowed hard as the ships began to circle the *Frayed Hunter*.

“Incoming hail captain,” the communications officer stated. Another shiver went down her spine. She nodded to the officer, who then opened communications with the ship.

“Unknown Republic spacecraft, please respond,” the message said. The entire cockpit breathed a sigh of relief. The codes looked to be working so far. “Unknown Republic spacecraft, please respond or we *will* open fire.” Evan looked to Celeste and flashed “98” to her. Two more percent and the ploy would be ready. She took a deep breath and placed her headset around her head.

“This is captain Ial of the *Frayed Hunter*, I have orders from Mon Mothma of the Galactic Senate to discuss the integration of your people into the New Republic.”

“We will not allow your filth to set foot on our pearl, new or not,” The ship responded. “Turn back now, or we will open fire.”

“If you are not to accept, I will be forced to send the rest of my fleet to ensure you cannot resist,” Celeste threatened.

“Do not fire until they have,” Evan said to the gunners. He faced the pilot. “No matter what happens, stay the course, we need to reach the planet’s atmosphere,” Evan whispered to him. He looked at his console one last time and flashed the numbers “100” to Celeste.

“You *dare* threaten to invade us?” the ship asked as anger emanated from his voice. “Haven’t your people learned this lesson enough?”

“Your people are a threat to our prosperity,” Celeste replied back. Suddenly, the ship rocked with an explosion.

“They just fired on us from starboard side!” Evan informed her as another explosion rocked the ship. “Port side has been hit as well!” He then screamed. Celeste looked about the ship in horror.

“Evan,” she said, “we need to retreat.”

“No can do,” Evan answered. “We’ll need to send a distress signal once on the planet”

“What are you talking about?” She asked. “We were never supposed to land on the planet.”

“Isard assumed you wouldn’t accept the job if you knew the full parameters,” he corrected her as he walked up to her, his hand in his pocket. “So I was to take command once we got this far.” Before she could say anything, she felt a needle pierce the skin of her arm. She looked and saw a blue liquid be pushed from a syringe into her bloodstream. Celeste’s eyesight began to dim almost instantaneously from the sedative. Evan looked at her slowly lose consciousness. Isard had ordered him to kill her, but he couldn’t bring himself to.

“More ships approaching!” The radar controller screamed. Celeste gripped the arms of her chair as she as the last thing she saw was the squadron of ships approaching ...

Echon awoke to the sound of explosions. He sat up on the couch as the emergency alarm began to sound. He turned on the lights, stood up, grabbed his gear and approached the bed where Aurea slept. Her eyes were open which made him think that she had woken up as well. He quickly realized that wasn’t the case when she wasn’t reacting to anything around her. “Aurea!” he screamed as he shook her. “Get up!” She blinked a couple of times.

“What is it?” she asked, half-asleep.

“We’re under attack!” he said. “We need to get to the escape pods!” He ran to the door, opened it, and checked the halls for trouble. “Come on!” he said once he realized the coast was clear. Aurea slid out of bed, grabbed her bag and quickly followed him down the halls.

As they approached the escape pods, another large explosion rocked the ship. Echon hoped there was a pod left as he peered down the row only to discover all of them were still in their bays. He grabbed Aurea by the hand and placed her in one of the pods. “Stay here,” he said, “I need to find Celeste.”

“Let’s just go!” she retorted. “Forget about her!” Echon ignored her and made his way to the cockpit, where everyone rushed about their stations in chaos. “Celeste,” he said as he grabbed her by the arm, “we need to get out of here!”

“We need to get closer to the planet,” Evan informed him as he pulled Echon away from the unresponsive captain. “Otherwise, they’ll just pick off our pods one by one.”

“Who are ‘they’?” Echon asked as he looked out the window at the planet before them. It was covered in grassy plains and lush blue water. He spotted a large desert in the middle of the planet. “Where are we?” Echon then asked.

“We’re deep within the *No Fly Zone*,” Evan answered as a large smile went across his face. He pointed to the planet ahead of them. “That’s Voltar, home to one of the only things the Empire feared, and we’re enticing them into attacking the New Republic for us.”

“Vol... Voltar!?” Echon stammered as his eyes widened in shock. The Volta were kept secret to most of the galaxy. They were a planet of bloodthirsty barbarians who wished nothing more than to wipe out their ancient oppressors, the Republic. He remembered the story of how the Volta was able to decimate the Empire seventeen years ago, when Palpatine attempted to take control of the planet, only to spend a year just trying to establish a landing zone.

Then he realized that Celeste had tricked him into going. Echon snapped out of his shock and grabbed Celeste by the arms. He shook her as hard as he could. He stared into her awaking eyes while anger emanated from his own. His teeth were clenched and almost shattered under the pressure he placed on them. He raised his fist in the air and Celeste awaited the blow. Suddenly he lowered his fist. He was placing his anger on the wrong person. He turned to Evan. “You’ve damned us all,” he muttered. He then let Celeste go and started to walk out of the cockpit, only to be blocked by Evan.

“Where do you think you’re going Tarkin?” he asked.

“I’m taking Aurea on a pod and getting out of this hell-hole,” Echon answered.

“If you leave now, your escape pod won’t even break the planet’s pull,” Evan explained.

“Then turn this ship around!” Echon screamed.

“I’m afraid we can’t do that,” Evan replied with a firm smug on his face. Echon clenched his teeth as he tried to shove Evan out of the way, but Evan grabbed a hold of Echon’s shoulders. “This is for your own good,” Evan said as he slammed Echon into the wall. Echon felt the air get knocked from his lungs. He slid to the ground as he tried to catch his breath. He looked up to see Evan removing a syringe from a case. Celeste leapt from her chair and tackled Evan by surprise. The syringe shattered as it struck the ground. Evan cursed his luck. He only had the one syringe with poison left. She turned and looked at Echon, who looked at her in pity, as if he felt sorry for her.

“Pilot, turn the ship around,” Celeste ordered as she turned to face the pilot, “we’ve made a big enough dent. Let’s return to base.”

“Disregard that order,” Evan struggled to the pilot.

“I am the captain of this vessel, no matter what Isard ordered,” Celeste said to Evan. Evan looked ready to confront her, his eyes were filled with rage and he placed his hand on his blaster, ready to draw it, but as he stared at Celeste, his heart fluttered. He couldn’t bring himself to do what needed to be done, how hard he tried.

“Captain,” the radar officer screamed once more, “one of their space stations has had an energy spike! It appears to be firing at us!” The sudden alert had snapped Evan out of his confusion.

“How much longer until it impacts?” he asked.

“Any minute,” the officer informed them. Celeste turned to her crew.

“Evacuate immediately!” she ordered. “We can’t risk it!” Evan nodded in agreement and then hurried with the rest of the fleeing crew to the escape pods. “Can you walk?” she asked as she helped Echon back up. He nodded as he took a deep breath. She then ran as fast as she could to the escape pod bay as Echon trailed behind her. He stumbled over to the one that contained Aurea and climbed in. Echon slid over to the console and hit the button to eject the pod just as Celeste and Evan climbed in. The pod was jettisoned from the ship and began to drift into Voltar’s atmosphere with the rest of the pods. Celeste watched as some of the pods were blown out of the sky by the Volta’s defense force. She closed her eyes and hoped that their pod would not meet the same fate as those.

“Look,” Evan said as the *Frayed Hunter* was struck with an electrical blast that seemed to surround the ship. The four of them watched as all the lights on the ship flickered off and the ship began to drift into the planet as well. Before they could see anything else, their vision was impaired by the arrival of clouds and the pod began to rumble and heat up, which signaled their entrance into Voltar.

“Brace for impact!” Celeste screamed as she strapped herself in. Echon began to do the same when he noticed that Aurea was struggling with her straps. He let go of his and quickly helped strap Aurea in when the pod struck the ground with a sickening thud. Echon was forced from his seat, plowed his head into the ceiling and blacked out.