

# Star Wars: Imperial Treachery

## Chapter 1

“Five minutes to hyperspace departure,” the pilot informed Evan Zenete. Evan crossed his arms.

“Thank you,” Evan said, “I’ll inform the captain that we’ve arrived. He turned and walked towards the turbolift. “Captain’s quarters,” he spoke to the intercom. He gussied himself up in the reflection in the stainless durasteel doors as they opened; making sure his well-groomed brown hair was all in place. He always wanted to look presentable for his superiors, even if they were of lower rank. Inside, he was treated to a large but simple room containing only a bed, a table and desk. For a captain’s quarters, it was less furnished than the crew’s quarters. Celeste Ial, captain of the *Frayed Hunter*, sat front of the desk, watching a holovid. Evan casually approached her. Celeste quickly turned off the holovid as soon as she heard his boots click on the floor.

“What is it?” she asked, spinning around. “I said I was not to be disturbed.”

“I’m sorry, captain,” Evan said, bowing. “I just wanted to inform you that we are arriving at Eriadu.” Celeste twirled her blonde hair with her index finger, lost in her thoughts. “The crew is expecting you on deck.” He noticed her distant expression in her emerald green eyes. He used her absence to admire her body for a few moments. Her dossier listed her as an average 1.6 meter, 74 kilogram eighteen year-old female with enough suicidal tendencies to put a disgraced Mandalorian to shame. Evan however saw a beautiful woman (only a few years younger than him) that just needed a shoulder to cry on, not that she’d ever admit that. It was a shame that such beauty had to be wasted on an individual like her. Regardless of how he felt, he needed to stay close to her and ensure that she didn’t do something Isard wouldn’t like. “Captain?” he finally said, hoping to get her attention.

“Huh?” she said, snapping back to reality. “Oh, of course, I’m on my way.” Evan saluted her and walked back to the turbolift. Celeste turned back to the desk and put the holovid away. She covered her face for a moment and took a deep breath. She stood up and walked to the turbolift. “Navigation deck,” she said. She was so nervous to return to Eriadu. She had not been home in years.

“Captain on deck!” a crewman said, saluting her as she exited the turbolift. She walked to the captain’s chair and sat down. She looked at the grayish planet ahead of her with a longing feeling. She noticed Evan sitting in her peripheral vision, staring at her. She shuddered a bit, hating how he always stared at her. It was a look that said he wanted to be more than her first mate.

Of course it was him that she had to thank for her current position. She hadn’t done anything since the Elsian blitz. The military council had deemed her a threat to the safety of the Empire and her people and pretty much retired her at more than half the age of normal retiring

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officers, and without honors to boot. After living on Sartinaynian for a couple of years, it was surprising to be asked to lead a mission, but what Ysanne Isard asks, an Imperial does. And what a mission it was. The New Republic planned to send peace emissaries to the planet of an ancient group of xenophobic humans who had a hatred for the Republic, located in an area known as the *No Fly Zone*. The *Frayed Hunter's* mission was to interrupt the negotiations and cause a war between the two factions. With a weakened Republic, the Empire could step in and remove both, gaining control of the galaxy once again. Celeste sighed for a second. Evan gave her the chance of a lifetime, if he wanted to ogle her, he could ogle her all he wanted.

The *Frayed Hunter* began to shake violently as it entered Eriadu's atmosphere, breaking her train of thought. "What's going on?" Celeste asked the pilot.

"The stabilizers aren't functioning properly," the pilot answered. Before anything else could happen, the shaking stopped. "Stabilizers are ... online," the pilot then said. "I don't know what to say. I'll have the mechanics check it out while we resupply."

"Very good," Evan said. He turned to Celeste. "Maybe it's a good idea to make this trip as fast as possible, that way, we can get back to the mission and back to an Imperial repair station."

"I trust my people," Celeste said, "we have a couple days' head start, if they can get the job done now, we'll have a much safer trip."

"Approaching Eriadu City spaceport," the pilot informed. "*Frayed Hunter* requesting to land, ready to transmit transponder codes at your call, over." The radio echoed static. "Eriadu City, this is the *Frayed Hunter* requesting to land, please respond, over." The crew was met with more static. The pilot turned to Celeste. "Ma'am, there is no response from the ground, your orders?" Celeste looked at the city looming below them. Something didn't seem right.

"Land the ship," she ordered. "If they have a problem, we'll inform them of the communication error. If that doesn't work, I'll introduce myself." The *Frayed Hunter* flew through the gray skies until it arrived at an open dock in the spaceport. The rod-like vessel extended its landed gear and touched down with a slight bump.

"I'll grab one of the engineers and see what the mechanics here can do," Evan said as he walked to the turbolift. Moments later, the docking ramp extended below the engine and Evan and a black-haired man departed the CR90 corvette. Evan looked around the empty port. "Evan Zenete of the *Frayed Hunter*!" he screamed, cupping his hands to amplify his voice. "We need to resupply!" His voice echoed throughout the empty port, unnerving him. "Where is everybody?"

"Maybe they're on holiday?" the black-haired man answered.

"No, we would have been informed," Evan said. "It's like everyone just got up and left."

“Evan, what’s going on down there?” Celeste asked through the comlink.

“I don’t know,” Evan said, “it’s like a ghost town captain.” There was a long pause.

“I’m coming down,” she said, breaking the silence.

“Roger that,” Evan said. He and the black-haired man turned and faced the ramp, waiting for the captain to arrive.

“So Jensen and I have a bet going,” the black-haired man said in a low voice. “I got five hundred credits that you and the captain have a thing going.”

“You’re out five hundred credits then,” Evan said.

“Damn, I figured,” the black-haired man said, dejected as the captain, wrapped in a white cloak, stepped out of the ship and onto the dock.

“The two of you stay here and start getting everything set up,” she ordered, “I’m going to go see if there’s anyone in town.”

“Yes ma’am,” Evan said, saluting her. Celeste turned and walked towards the exit to the city.

“You should get a piece of that,” the black-haired man suggested.

“You better tighten up your act or I’ll have you repairing mining equipment on Mustafar,” Evan threatened. “Now shut up the frick up and get to work.”

“She’s colder than usual,” the black-haired man said as he attached the fuel pump to the tank.

“This is her first time home since joining the navy,” Evan informed. “I don’t think she expected things to be like this.”

Celeste walked through the empty streets of Eriadu City. The more she looked at the abandoned stores the more depressed she got. It had been what, four, five years since she left to join the Empire? The years just seemed to fly by, and now here she was, standing in what was left of her hometown. Not even a soul to greet her. She stopped once she came into view of Tarkin Mansion, her old home. Well, it wasn’t her home exactly. It belonged to the Tarkin family, what was left of it at least. The home, like the family, was in shambles. The siding paint was peeling, the windows were cracked and the big Kashyyyk wood doors that Wilhuff had spent so many credits on were faded with age. The outside landscape was nothing to boast about either, with dead or dying plants strewn about the grounds. It was painful to see the place in such disrepair. She turned around to finally see a statue in the middle of the square. It was new to her, erected since she left. The statue featured two figures, one of Wilhuff, the other of his son,

Echon. Wihuff was a calm, calculated yet deadly individual, with a wit as sharp as his cheekbones. His son however did not have his father's cheekbones or his wit. He tarnished his father's name with his debauchery and only after he died trying to prevent the rebels from destroying the second *Death Star* did he redeem himself.

In a way, she hoped to redeem her own name with this mission. Her actions at Elsian might have resulted in the capture of that foolish Mon Calamari Kilbasa, but it cost her everything. She knew Isard's plan was a suicide mission but also knew that if everything went right, she would be remembered as the one who brought down the New Republic. At least then she and Echon would be in the history books. A part of her died that day she found his name among the list of dead at Endor. And by the looks of it, so did the city of Eriadu, wherever they were. She approached the statue and examined the features on the subjects. Echon appeared a few years older than she remembered. His hair was a little longer, and his cheekbones were slightly showing. He looked almost like his father. She smirked, knowing that Echon would have hated to be compared to him. She read the inscription, dreading every second of it: *Grand Moff Wilhuff Tarkin, 64 BBY - 0BBY* and *Captain Echon Tarkin, 11 BBY - ~~4ABY~~*. That wasn't right. Someone had crossed out his date of death. Before she could dwell on it, she could hear voices. Faint, but they were coming from somewhere. As she looked around she saw an old woman appear from around a building. The woman looked at her for a few seconds and slowly approached her.

"Celeste?" the old woman said, hoping her eyesight wasn't going. "Celeste Ial?" As soon as she could finally see Celeste clearly, the old woman ran as fast as her feeble legs would take her and grabbed Celeste's hands. "By Tarkin's ghost it is you!" Her face wrinkled up as she smiled. "First, young Echon returns to us and now you've come back as well."

"Echon's ... alive?" Celeste asked, stunned at what the old woman had just said.

"Why yes," the old woman answered, "he's over at the bar with most of the town celebrating." Before the old woman could say anything else, Celeste ripped her hands from the woman's and ran down the streets to the old bar. So many thoughts were running through her mind. She remembered the last night she saw him and now, after all these years, she had a chance to finally tell Echon what she wanted to that night. She *loved* him. She reached the old bar, which by now had nearly the entire city's population inside. A fire hazard if she ever saw one. She ran into the crowd and started shoving her way into the bar. The crowd got thicker as she closed in on Echon's location, making it harder to push her way through. She stood up on an empty chair and spotted Echon in the middle of the bar. His back was turned, but she could already tell that it was him. His stance was right, with his legs spread equally apart, balancing him on the table he stood upon. His holsters were empty, probably a good thing, considering that it probably wouldn't be pretty if one of these drunken losers got a hold of one of his blasters. He was wearing his Imperial uniform, well, the pants at least. He had a tight gray shirt on instead. In

one hand was a cup, most likely filled with liquor, his other was empty and flying about as he told a story to the crowd.

“...and so the rodian thinks I’m down for the count,” he said in an excited tone, “but little did he know that I had a hold-out blaster for just an occasion. So I pull it out and scream ‘hey long-snout!’” He made a motion of shooting a gun with his fingers. “And boom, the rodian stumbled back and over the edge, plummeting to his death.” The crowd cheered, raising their glasses to toast Echon and whatever amazing deed he had done.

“Echon!” Celeste screamed, hoping to get his attention. Her voice was drowned out by the hoots and hollers from everyone around her. “Echon!” she screamed louder. No luck. She needed to get his attention somehow. Her eyes widened as soon as she realized what she needed to say. “Hey Emil!” she screamed as loud as she could. Sure enough, Echon stopped what he was doing and turned around. Emil was her nickname for him. Echon’s mother called him that since it was a more “proper name” for a Tarkin. Celeste used to use it all the time to embarrass him amongst his friends. He stepped down from the table and walked towards her, the crowd parting for him. As he got nearer she noted every feature in his face, from his short brown hair to the stubble on his chin. He looked nothing like the statue she had seen. She stared at him like she would never get the chance see any of that ever again. When his light blue eyes lit up, Celeste flashed him her big, snow white smile as tears swelled up in her eyes.

“Emil, now that’s a name I haven’t heard in a long time,” he said, embracing her.

“I can’t believe you’re alive,” she said, trying to hold back her tears. The crowd had stopped what they were doing to admire the scene before them.

“How long has it been?” Echon asked as he made some space between them, still holding her at arm’s length.

“Five years,” she answered.

“*Only* five?” he said with a smirk, “come on Celery, you’ve always been one to count something to the second.” A few patrons chuckled.

“Don’t call me that,” Celeste said, embarrassed. She used to have a garden at the mansion, celery being her favorite crop. Also, he liked to use it since it flowed so well with her name.

“You call me names, I’ll call you names,” he said, smiling again. “Five years huh?” he asked, his smile fading.

“Yeah,” she answered, lifting her feet up from nerves. Echon spotted the little gesture.

“Maybe we should take this conversation somewhere more private,” he suggested. Whoops, wrong choice of words. The crowd erupted into barks and whistles. “Come on,” he said as he grabbed her by the hand and dragged her through the crowd.

“Where are we going?” she asked, face almost completely red from embarrassment.

“Where else?” Echon answered as they exited the bar, the smirk returning to his face. The two of them left the crowds behind and ran all the way back to Tarkin square and up the path to their old home. They approached the faded doors and Echon finally let go of Celeste’s hand. “Sorry about that,” he said as he fiddled with the door lock.

“Its fine,” she said as she rubbed her arms in nervousness. *What did he mean by private?* Her thoughts were cut off once again as the big double doors slid open, revealing the dark, dusty entryway. Celeste followed him inside the hall, lit only by the open doors.

“I told her to turn some lights on,” he muttered as he stepped towards the wall, feeling around for the light switch. As he pressed the button, the doors closed once more, leaving them in the pitch black for a moment as the lights flickered to life, revealing the old, familiar décor. The translucent white stone floor was mined from the marble quarries of Wayland. Celeste walked past Echon towards the parlor, and examined the various pieces of furniture. The walls were paneled with wood also from the forests of Kashyyyk. Everything in the house was expensive. It made sense since Wilhuff was a Grand Moff; he needed to look the part of royalty. She approached an old table and removed her cloak, placing it on the nearby chair. She then placed her hand on the table and quickly lifted it off, leaving a handprint amongst the nine years of dust.

“Old, isn’t it?” Echon asked as he walked towards the table as well.

“Indeed,” Celeste said as she wiped her hand off on her green uniform and turned to him. “Lady Tarkin never returned?” she asked. Echon’s face grew dark and anger settled in his eyes.

“She was a traitor to the Empire,” he answered. “She could rot in the mines of Kessel for all I care.”

“Well what about your cousin?” she then asked.

“After she left the academy on Clær, who knows?” he answered, the anger subsiding as quickly as it appeared. “Like I care anyway, she was always jealous that we got away with anything as kids.” He ran his fingers in the dust. “For her it was ‘shape up or ship out’, lost a good servant family because of her.” He approached the fireplace, admiring the portrait of his father. He placed his hand on his chin and tried mimicking the famous pose. Celeste walked towards him and noticed the anguish on his face.

“You’re not your father,” Celeste assured him.

“I’m glad you think that,” Echon answered. “But I am my father’s son, and the general populace expects to be just like him.”

“Just because you’re your father’s son doesn’t mean you have to live like him,” she mentioned. Echon seemed to ignore her and started to walk towards the kitchen.

“I wonder where my father left his alcohol,” he said as he stopped in front of the conservator and peeked inside. He quickly shut the door as the stench inside reached his nostrils. “Well,” he said as struggled to keep his food down, “just the way I left it.” Celeste laughed a little as she walked towards the rather large cabinet in the dining room.

“If I remember correctly,” she said as she opened the cabinet, “your father always kept it right here.” Echon walked over to her as she examined the various liquors Willhuf had collected over the span of his life. They had their choices from Alavari ale to Zeltron spice wine.

“Coruscant blush wine,” Echon said as he removed a bottle from the cabinet, “my father always had the most expensive tastes.”

A few hours later, Echon and Celeste were sprawled out on the kitchen floor laughing away. “. . .and the stormtrooper goes ‘AT-AT? I bench-press that.’” Echon said, unable to control his laughter. Celeste found herself chuckling as well. She would never have found that story funny if she was sober. “Ah,” Echon sighed, “I bet I’m boring you with such awful stories.”

“No,” she lied, “it’s just been a long day.”

“That it has,” Echon agreed. “Hey, I’ve said it enough, but,” he paused, trying to find his words. “It’s really nice to see you again.” Celeste smiled. “You’re the best friend a guy could ever have.” Celeste choked on her last bit of drink in her cup.

“I think I need another drink,” she said as she quickly stood up. She stumbled forward, falling into Echon’s arms.

“I think you’ve had enough,” he said as he brought her back to her knees. She could smell the liquor on his breath. She blushed as she bit her lower lip.

“Why,” she said, looking down at the ground, “why did you leave?”

“I didn’t leave,” Echon answered jokingly; silently ashamed.

“You’ve allowed the Empire to believe you were dead for three years,” Celeste explained. “You let your own people erect a memorial statue in your honor.” She then looked right into Echon’s eyes. “Not to mention me.” Echon lay down on the floor, staring at the ceiling. He didn’t know how to respond to what she had just said. He opened his mouth to say something when he heard a crash in the other room. “What was that?!” Celeste exclaimed, turning her head towards the doorway. Suddenly a young teenage girl stepped inside the kitchen. She was about

one and a half meters, judging from her height to the counter. Or she could be over two meters tall, since her vision was all out of whack from the alcohol. One and a half sounded about right for a kid. The girl had light-brown hair. Celeste kind of envied the body it had. What had Celeste really intrigued was the outfit the girl was wearing. It was a long sleeved light-green shirt that had the shoulders split open. The pants were a dark green that appeared to have a tear near the ankle region. The tear and the clothes themselves seemed familiar.

“Sorry,” the girl said, staring off towards the opposite wall, “I’m still trying to find my way around here.” She smiled as she rubbed the bruise on her forearm.

“Aurea,” Echon said, smiling as he sat up, “how nice of you to join us.” Aurea continued to stare at the wall, ignoring the two on the floor.

“What are you doing?” Aurea asked.

“Just drinking,” Echon answered. Aurea gave a slight sigh before she turned around. She hated it when he drank. It usually resulted in her dragging his drunken ass back to their ship. The good news was they were staying in his old home, so there wouldn’t be any need to drag him anywhere.

“Those are my clothes!” Celeste exclaimed, finally realizing why the clothes seemed so familiar.

“Who was that?” Aurea said, spinning around in surprise. She looked around the room, unable to find the location of Celeste.

“It’s a friend of mine,” Echon said to the apparent blind girl. Aurea stopped looking and focused on Echon’s voice. “And it seems you took some of her old clothes.”

“Oh,” Aurea said, slightly embarrassed at her reaction, “I’m sorry, I just liked the way the fabric felt.” She then abruptly walked out of the kitchen, leaving Echon and Celeste alone.

“Sorry about that,” Echon said to Celeste.

“Who was that?” she asked. Before he could answer, her comlink buzzed, yet another interruption.

“Captain,” Evan grudgingly said over the comlink, “where are you?” Celeste cleared her throat, hoping to sober up the next couple of seconds.

“What is it?” she said, her tone unusually high-pitched. Her attempt at sounding serious failed.

“Uh,” Evan replied, surprised to hear his captain sound so uppity. “Supplies and repairs are done. We’re ready to leave when you are.” Celeste set her comlink down.



“I need to go,” Celeste said as she stood up again. Echon leapt up and grabbed her as she stumbled once again. Even though he was as equally drunk, he had a much higher tolerance.

“How often do you drink?” he asked as he set her down once again.

“I never drink,” she answered, “my father wanted to raise me like a princess, before he died of course.”

“He was a good man,” Echon said, “but you’re in no condition to go out, especially at this hour.” Celeste looked at the clock. It was late. “You should stay here for the night. If the Empire is as I remember it, they’ll want you at your best.”

“I couldn’t,” Celeste declined, “I shouldn’t intrude your home any longer.”

“Celeste, you know that this is as much your home as it is mine,” Echon said. “Besides, you can barely walk. Call your shipmate and tell him you’re staying here for the night.” Celeste thought for a moment. She then grabbed her comlink and turned it on.

“Evan,” she said as she slowly stood up. “I’m staying the night at the Tarkin mansion. Make sure the crew is ready to depart.”

“Oh?” Evan said, surprised. “Okay captain, we’ll see you tomorrow.” Celeste turned off the comlink and looked back at Echon.

“I guess I’ll take my old room then,” she said as she grabbed his hand. “Care to whisk me away?” she drunkenly asked. Echon smiled and lead her out of the kitchen.

“So, *captain*,” he emphasized as he led Celeste up the stairs to the bedrooms, “where are you and your crew heading off to?”

“Nothing I can say,” she answered. “I can’t compromise my mission. The fate of the Empire depends on it.”

“Not even a hint?” Echon asked, intrigued. Celeste shook her head. Though she was tipsy, she wasn’t about to break so many protocols. Echon was slightly impressed. The Empire’s anti-interrogation classes really did seem to work. “Oh well, here we are,” he said as they approached the door to her old bedroom. “It’s probably a little dusty, so be sure to fluff the pillows before lying down.” Celeste just stared at him for a moment before she placed her hand on the doorknob at the same time he did. He laughed, finding the little action silly. She laughed as well, but something in her heart then told her to do something drastic. She closed her eyes and leaned forward, hoping to plant her lips on his. Echon grabbed her by the shoulders and pushed her back.

“Wow, you must be tired,” he said, oblivious to her true actions.

“Yeah, I guess,” she replied as she started blushing again, not just from the alcohol this time. She turned the door knob and quickly stepped inside. “Good night,” she said, “don’t let the rancors bite.”

“Good night,” he replied with a smile. She shut the door and turned to admire the room. It was filled with her old collection of rare clolls, or cloth dolls. Clolls were made from the silk of the tempus spider, and was extremely sturdy, able to withstand wear and tear. They were highly popular when Lady Tarkin was a child and she had given her the clolls since she was like a daughter to the household. She walked to the shelf lined with the cloth dolls and picked one up. It was of a Twi’lek dancer, a favorite of Echon’s. She smiled, remembering how she used to force him to play dolls with her. It was payback for all the times she was forced to go explore the forests and caves by the mansion. She placed the blue-skinned cloll down and walked over to the bed. She removed her jacket and collapsed onto the dusty mattress. The dust quickly irritated her nose and she soon had a sneezing fit. She was glad for the dust, since it was an excuse to allow her to cry. A wave of emotion washed over her, letting all the events of today hit her like a runaway shaak. She hadn’t really cried in a long time. Not since she thought Echon had died. Unlike that time, it was tears of happiness. For once it seemed like everything was looking up. Once her fit had ceased, she looked around the room one last time. She then closed her watering eyes and drifted off to an uneasy sleep.