

Star Wars: Imperial Treachery

Chapter 2

Echon awoke to find a hand on his face, knowing immediately that it was Aurea. “I’m awake,” he said, causing the teenager to reel back. She was dressed in a white nightgown, something else she had taken from Celeste’s room. Her eyes, yet again, didn’t focus on him, only on the poster-covered wall by his bed.

“I’m sorry,” she quickly apologized. “I’ve been walking around this house trying to find you. I ran into your friend, she’s passed out cold, so I didn’t wake her but I kept finding empty rooms-”

“Aurea,” Echon interrupted, “any reason *why* you’re walking around blind?” Aurea blushed.

“Because I’m afraid those sensors will go off,” she explained.

“What sensors?” Echon asked, sitting up.

“The Empire’s Force detecting sensors,” she answered. “I figured that since this was still an Imperial dominant planet they’d still have them set up.”

“First off, could you step back a bit?” Echon said, trying to climb out of bed. Aurea took a couple steps back into the dresser. “Oops,” Echon said as he grabbed his pants from the floor, “should’ve warned you about that.” Aurea stepped forward, glaring at him as she rubbed her back. “Anyways, the detector thing you’re talking about was a tiny handheld item. And my father banned them from the planet. He didn’t want paranoia to rule the people.” He slipped his pants on as he got out of bed. “So you can stop whatever you’re doing.” Aurea exhaled, as if she had just emerged from the ocean. Her eyes began to move normally, sort of. They still had stiffness to how they moved.

“You don’t know how hard it was to sleep last night,” she said with relief in her voice. Echon smirked as he changed shirts. Aurea was a Miraluka, a near-human race that used the Force to see. From what she told him, she saw the world in a shade of grey, except for people, who had an aura that ranged from red and blue. To her people, a blue aura meant a person was caring and willing to sacrifice their needs for the safety of others, while a red aura meant a person was ruthless and placed themselves over others. Echon had asked her once what his aura was, but she never answered.

The sound of a bell rang through the house, signaling that someone was at the door. Aurea turned to the direction of the door. To Miraluka, walls and doors were simply an obstruction to their physical body, their Force sight could penetrate walls to see for a certain distance. “Poodoo,” she said, “I can’t see him from here.”

“Get dressed,” Echon said as he walked to the door. “I’ll go see who it is.” He walked out into the hallway and made his way to the staircase. Once there, he jogged down the steps to the door. For a man who had drunk so much the night before, he was pretty active. He approached the door and opened it, revealing Evan Zenete along with two Imperial officers. “Can I help you?” Echon asked as Evan stared at him awkwardly.

“I’m sorry,” Evan said, “my captain said she was staying the night here.”

“You mean Celeste?” Echon said, stepping back. “She’s still asleep. I can go wake her up.” He started to head up the stairs.

“No that’s fine,” Evan said, stopping Echon in his tracks. “I’d rather have her wake up on her own accord. It’s bad luck to wake up your captain.” Evan continued to stare at Echon. He knew he had seen his face before. “Emperor save me, you’re Echon Tarkin!” Echon blushed at Evan’s realization. “So the rumors were true, the head of the beachtroopers really did survive the battle.” The men next to him chuckled.

“We preferred the Galactic Guard,” Echon said through gritted teeth. Out of anything, Echon hated being reminded of that little incident on Feriae. What happens when you get a bunch of drunken rich kids on camera? You get chewed out by Nem Bocaj and the rest of his news team, that’s what. That little “beachtrooper incident” had him clearing out rebel hideouts in fringe space for a year and then nearly dying at Endor with the rest of his men.

“Now listen,” Evan said, lifting his hands. He could tell Echon was angered by his statement. “I’m not trying to infuriate you here, just trying to make small talk, that’s all.” Echon scoffed. “Let me make it up to you,” Evan said, walking towards Echon cautiously. “I’m on an important mission, on that will determine the-”

“Fate of the Empire,” Echon interrupted, “Celeste told me. I’m not interested.” Evan tweaked his mouth.

“She told you?” Evan asked. “That was some very sensitive information. She shouldn’t be giving information out like that, especially to a traitor like you.” Echon’s eyebrows scrunched in anger at the accusation.

“How dare you,” Echon said, walking towards Evan.

“How dare I?” Evan repeated. “You’re the one who fled the battle as your squad mates burned to ash. A few survived, one’s so messed up he has the intelligence of a Wookiee. The other, your commanding officer no less, said you retreated without even giving the order. They never knew what happened. If he hadn’t tried to follow you, he would’ve died with everyone else. So how dare you show your face to this planet, you coward, you traitor.” Echon turned around. Evan removed a case from his pocket and took a syringe from it.

“Get out of my home,” he said coldly, “I’ll have Celeste meet you-” Before Echon could finish his sentence Evan had grabbed him by the throat and jammed the syringe into his neck. The sedative didn’t take long to drain Echon of all his energy, knocking him out. Evan dragged his body to the men by the door.

“Get him onboard the ship,” Evan ordered them. “If the ‘captain’ falls out of line, we have some leverage to put her back on track.” The men grabbed Echon by the arms and took him away. Evan put the syringe into the case as a drop of blood dripped from the needle onto the floor. Evan ignored the blood and made his way up the steps to the bedrooms. “Celeste?” he said into the comlink as he stood at the end of the hall.

Celeste awoke to the sound of Evan’s voice on her comlink. She quickly rolled onto her back and sat up, putting a hand on her forehead. She drank too much last night. “Captain, we need to get going soon,” Evan then said. She set her feet on the floor and made her way to the door. As she opened the door, she realized that she was only wearing her green undershirt. She ran back to the bed and grabbed her jacket, buttoning it as she exited to the hall. “There you are captain,” Evan greeted.

“Evan!” she exclaimed, shocked to see him. “How’d you get in?”

“The front door was open,” he lied. Celeste’s face turned from shock to worry.

“Is Echon here?” she asked. Evan faked shock.

“Echon?” he said, his acting almost sounding genuine, “I had heard about his return from the fueling crew, but I didn’t see anyone here. Place was empty, except for you.” Celeste rubbed her arms, a feeling of betrayal flowed down her spine. He had left without saying goodbye. “Ma’am, we need to get going,” Evan insisted. Celeste sighed and walked down the hall and past Evan, making her way to the door. “Looks like we’re back on track,” Evan muttered as he walked down the steps to the door as well, shutting the door behind him.

Aurea stepped out of the refresher as she dried her hair, wearing her outfit from the day before. As she stepped into the hallway she looked around, unable to see--or sense--Echon. She cautiously walked to the foyer, only to find the place completely devoid of life. She then spotted a drop of some type of liquid on the floor. She walked down the steps and knelt down in front of the liquid. She could smell the iron in the liquid, knowing that it was blood. A splitting headache knocked her to the ground. She saw an image of Echon being attacked. A red-aura man shoved a needle into his throat, knocking him out. The red-aura man then handed Echon off to other men. “Get him onboard the ship,” he said to them. The vision subsided, leaving her scared. As rare as her visions came, Aurea always knew they brought bad news and this one was no different; Echon had been kidnapped. Panicking, she stood up and ran back up the stairs and into Echon’s room, stopping only to grab his bag and quickly returned towards the front door. She stopped to grab Celeste’s white cloak and wrapped it around herself, hoping it would provide some sort of

cover from people, and shut the front door. She reached into the bag and removed a book from within. She flipped through the pages until she landed on the one she was looking for. She read her mother's elegant handwriting, letting the Force flow through her as she followed the instructions her mother had written down years before. Her calves tightened and time itself seemed to slow down. She closed the journal and placed it into the bag once more before speeding down the walkway towards the spaceport. She didn't have a lot of time; that ship was going to leave soon.

Celeste stood at the foot of the ramp, dialing Echon's comlink over and over again. Reception didn't matter; she was more on the lookout to see if he had left or not. It would've helped to know what ship he had come in on. "Ma'am," Evan said as he exited the ship once more, "we really need to get going if we want this mission to succeed." He then turned to the black-haired engineer from before. "Are all the supplies ready?" he asked.

"Just waiting on one last load," the black-haired man answered. Evan then grabbed the reluctant captain by her arm and dragged her up the ramp. Before the engineer was able to pull the switch to lift the supplies into the cargo hold, a brown-haired man approached him.

"So what did Zenete say?" the brown-haired man asked. The black-haired man sighed and turned to his friend, Jensen.

"He says it's just business between them," he answered.

"Pay up Jared," Jensen said, removing a transfer chip from his pocket. Jared sighed, turned his attention away from the supplies and removed his credit chip, plugging it into the transfer chip. As the transfer was nearing completion, Jared heard a sound behind him. "Focus on the transfer man," Jensen said, watching as Jared turned his head toward the load of supplies.

"I thought I heard a noise," Jared said.

"The only sound I hear is the sound of a hundred credits going into my account," Jensen said. A ding confirmed the completion of the transfer. "And there we go," he said as he removed Jared's chip and handed it back to him. Jared mouthed an expletive to Jensen's back as he left and then pulled the switch, finally letting the supplies into the cargo hold.

"We're all set," he said into his comlink as he boarded the ship, pressing the button to raise the ramp on his way up.

Back on the bridge, Celeste sat once more in her chair, brooding. She had been so close to what she desired, only to have it walk out on her without saying good-bye once more. Her life felt as empty as it did when they first landed. "Engines powering up," the pilot said as he flipped a few switches. Celeste turned to face Evan, who was busy talking to one of the many men on board. From the way Evan was talking, it seemed like he didn't like what he had heard. Suddenly she felt the gravitational pressure, which signaled that the ship rising into the air. She quickly

turned her attention to the window of the cockpit, watching as the clouds sank below them until they hit the blackness of space, which relieved them of the pressure. "Preparing coordinates for jump to hyperspace," the pilot said as he entered numbers into the console. "Destination, Voltar." The entire bridge fell silent. The pilot turned to Celeste. "Shall we proceed?" he asked. Celeste only nodded. The pilot gripped the handle of the hyperspace regulator and pushed it forward. Suddenly the ship jerked forward as the stars around them became lines and then with a snap, they were in hyperspace. The cockpit windows were quickly sealed in order to prevent the crew from going mad with hyper-rapture. Celeste stood up and walked over to Evan, who quickly shooed the man he was talking to away.

"I'm going to my room," she informed him. "Until I return, you are in command." Evan saluted her until the doors to the turbolift closed. When she exited the turbolift, Celeste walked over to her desk and sat down, removing a holovid from one of the drawers. She powered it on and watched an old video of her and Echon on his fifth birthday. That day was special to her since her mother had just died and Wilhuff had allowed her to remain on the premises as a gift to Echon. As cruel as that man was, he couldn't bear to see his only son lose his best friend. A tear ran down Celeste's cheek as she watched as little Echon wrapped his arms around her. If things were different, she'd probably be living on the streets of Eridu City right now, if she had survived. She turned the holovid off and put it back in the drawer and removed another, ready to watch that one as well...

Down in the cargo hold, Jared and Jensen walked through the low pressure environment, scanning all the supplies. Both of them had an air-tank to help them breathe. "Are we going to need this much food?" Jensen asked, his voice slightly muffled by the mask.

"No idea," Jared answered, "better safe than sorry I guess." Ever since they had left Eriadu, Jensen had been asking random questions about the supplies and Jared was getting annoyed by it. He scanned another box, this one contained canteens of water.

"Isn't it weird though?" Jensen then asked. Jared sighed and rolled his eyes. "The mission parameters said we weren't going to leave the ship, why all this?" He searched for a tag to scan on a small white bag.

"I really don't know," Jared answered. "Why don't you ask the captain?" Jensen didn't respond.

"There isn't a tag on this bag," Jensen informed Jared. Jared walked over to Jensen and viewed the bag. The bag seemed familiar. "It could be an explosive." Jensen said as Jared knelt down.

"Don't jump to conclusions so fast," Jared said as he grabbed the fabric of the bag. As he pulled on it, he realized that it wasn't a bag; it was the captain's cloak. And underneath the cloak was a young girl. "By Tarkin's ghost!" he exclaimed. He quickly checked the girl's pulse and

placed a hand to her mouth. She was barely breathing and her pulse was low. He removed his air-tank and placed the rather large mask on her bluing face. "I got to get her to the medical bay fast," he told Jensen as he picked her up. "Call ahead and tell them we got a blue-face!" Jensen nodded as he grabbed his comlink. Jared quickly ran for the door and entered the pressurization chamber. "You picked the wrong ship to stow away on," Jared said as he waited for the pressure to equalize. When it was done, Jared readjusted the girl in his arms and ran to the medical bay. As he entered the bay, a nurse and a doctor approached him with a stretcher.

"Any idea when she got on board?" the doctor on call asked as he and the nurse took the girl from Jared's arms and placed her on the stretcher. Jared shook his head as he struggled to catch his breath.

"Wait," he said, remembering something. "I think I heard her sneak on right before I loaded the last lift into the cargo hold."

"The captain will need a full report," the doctor said. "She's lucky at least. A few more minutes and she probably wouldn't have made it." The doctor shined a light into her eyes. "No response," the doctor said when her eyes didn't react. He checked her pulse. "She seems to have stabilized at least. Return to your post for now. I need to speak to the captain." Jared took one last look at the young girl and then left the room. The doctor checked her heartbeat and when he was satisfied with what he heard, he departed for the bridge. The nurse returned to her game of pazaak on her console. After every round, she turned to see if the girl was still breathing and then quickly return to her game. After four rounds she forgot the girl was even there. Suddenly she heard the door slide open. The nurse quickly quit her game and faced the door.

"She's doing fine doc-" she started to say; only to stop when she realized there was no one at the door. She turned towards the stretcher and saw that it was empty. She walked up to the door and stepped out as it opened but the girl was nowhere in sight.

Aurea skittered down the hall, hoping to be out of sight before the nurse noticed. She rounded a corner just as she heard the door open. She didn't need to peek around the corner to see if the nurse was following her. The nurse took a few steps forward before returning to the medical bay; no doubt to call security. Aurea blamed her lack of concentration on the whole situation. If she had been able to focus on keeping her trance instead of freaking out when the ship went into hyperspace she could have plenty of time to escape the cargo hold. She ran and turned another corner. She then cleared her mind, letting it try to find Echon. There were too many bodies on the ship. It hindered her search. She didn't have a lot of control of her abilities and the fact she lacked training didn't help either. This was going to be tougher than she predicted. She took a deep breath and tried again. This time she spotted a grey aura that stood out from all the reds. Echon was a mixed bag. From the time she met him he had been teetering on the edge of red. He had been attempting to redeem his past since the day she met him. He was persistent though. Not many people were able to just change their auras. Not without some kind

of life altering experience. Whatever happened to Echon before she met him must have done that. Echon never talked much about his past. The sound of footsteps snapped her back to reality. Aurea quickly headed into a nearby room and hid behind some crates. The two men passed by the door without hesitating. She was safe, for now. She walked over to a grate on the wall. Since she could see the entire interior of the ship, she could see where the vent travelled. Sure enough, the vent went right to the room Echon was held in. She tried to find a place to grab the grate but couldn't find anything; it was flush to the wall. She didn't want to use the Force so wildly, especially in an Imperial ship. The approach of another group of people twisted her arm. She didn't have a choice. She needed to rescue Echon and get the frick out of here. She took a step back, reached out with her hand and concentrated on pulling the grate from the wall. The grate struggled against its bindings until it finally gave away with a loud grinding noise. As soon as the vent was opened, Aurea checked to see if any soldiers were coming. Nobody did seem to notice. She grabbed the grate and crawled into the vent, trying her hardest to hide the fact that the grate had been breached. Once she was satisfied with the grate, she tried to turn around, but found the vent was too small for that. She sighed and began to crawl backwards, hoping that she'd quickly hit somewhere where she could turn around. Either way, it'd be a while before she'd get to Echon's location.

Evan sat in the captain's chair, feeling like he was on top of the world. If the captain was any other person, he'd never think of sitting in their chair. Celeste however, he could care less. Though he had been uncertain in going to Eriadu, he was glad it had been able to drive Celeste further into depression. And if she decided to grow a backbone, all he had to do was threaten to kill Echon. He had her in the palm of his hand and he loved it. And once this mission was complete, he'd finally have a high position in the Imperial government. He'd be an equal with Isard and not her lap-dog. He grinned at the thought. His name would forever be in the record books. Maybe thousands of years later, students at the Imperial Academy would be learning about him. Oh the thought was too much; his face had the biggest smile. He heard the turbolift door open. The footsteps were too heavy to be the captain's. The doctor approached the captain's chair, shocked to not see the captain sitting in it. "I'm currently in command until the captain returns from her chambers," Evan explained to the doctor. "What is it?"

"I just wanted to report that we had a stowaway on board," the doctor said. Evan's eyes widened. Did the doctor come across Echon?

"What did you do with him?" Evan painfully asked.

"It was a young girl, sir," the doctor answered. "She's currently in the medical bay, recovering from acute-asphyxiation." Evan sighed. At least it wasn't Echon.

"Very well," Evan said. "I'll inform the captain and have her decide the girl's fate. Keep her in the medical bay until we know what to do with her." The doctor gave a quick salute and returned to the turbolift. As the turbolift returned, Evan thought once more about his future glory.

His big smile returned to his face as he entered the lift and pressed the button for the captain's quarter's. He didn't bother to groom himself as he exited into Celeste's room. "Captain," he said as he walked across the room towards her. "I've just been informed that a stowaway was found." Celeste ignored him as she watched an old holo vid. He couldn't tell what it was from his position. He grumbled something under his breath. "Captain!" he exclaimed, waking her from whatever trance she was in. She turned around and stood up.

"What is it?" she asked, clearly annoyed.

"Frankly captain," Evan said, stepping towards her. "I'm tired of how you just sit around and mope about the past instead of doing your duties as a captain." He turned around so she didn't see the grin on his face. "I'm starting to wonder why Isard picked you for this mission." Celeste turned away from Evan. He was right, she wasn't captain material. "Either way," Evan said, heading for the turbolift. "I was only informing you that we have a stowaway onboard. Usually, I would just dispose of the cretin, but considering how young she is--"

"A young girl?" Celeste interrupted. "What does she look like?"

"Um," Evan stammered, taken aback by Celeste. "I don't know, she's in the medical bay though." Celeste ran into the turbolift and headed down to the main deck. Evan stood in place, unsure of what had just transpired. He walked towards the desk and picked up the holo vid, turning it on. He watched as various men (obviously stormtroopers out of uniform) waltzed around a resort carrying alcohol and spice. Evan knew exactly what was playing; it was the infamous "beach-trooper incident". He fast-forward through the video up until the end of it where the cameraman entered a smoke filled room.

"TK-975 why aren't you at your post?" the cameraman jokingly asked a stormtrooper lying on the floor.

"I'm totally freaking out man!" TK-975 exclaimed. He then picked up his spectacles from the floor and put them on. Before he could do anything else, a rather large stormtrooper picked TK-975 up and tossed him out the window. The trooper then turned his attention to the camera. A splash could be heard outside.

"You see that Skywalker?" the trooper said. "You mess with me and I'll throw your farm-boy ass off a cliff!" He then pointed his finger at everybody near him. "Hell, I'll do that to any of you if you mess with me. I'll do it to the Emperor himself!"

Evan laughed at the stormtrooper's antics as he turned off the holo vid. That was the kind of riff-raff that Echon associated himself with. The Galactic Guard was a sham; created to keep rich politician's sons from getting hurt. Instead they partied all day. Evan wished that he could have served there, but you can only get so far in the ranks when your father was a lowly farmer on Dantooine. And getting injured didn't net you any awards. You only got your pay docked.

Life as an Imperial was chaos. He set the holovid down and waltzed over to the turbolift, only stopping to glance at the captain's closet. He wondered if she had a shrine to Echon in there. As he stepped towards it he stopped. He was above snooping in someone's private quarters. That holovid didn't count; it was sitting on a desk. Besides, she probably kept her unmentionables in there. If she, or anyone else (especially someone else) caught him, he would be done for. Besides, he was a pervert. He ignored the closet, walked to the turbolift and called for it. He stepped in as soon as it arrived and headed down to the main deck, where the medical bay was located, as well as Echon. And he didn't need Celeste finding him. As the turbolift doors opened, Celeste was already there. "We need to abort the mission!" she exclaimed. "Aurea's on this ship!"

"What are you talking about?" Evan asked, stunned at what she had said.

"Aurea!" she answered. "Echon's... I don't know what she is, but she knows Echon. I think Echon is onboard as well."

"Captain," Evan said, placing his hands on her shoulders. "I think you're overreacting. And remember, we're on a timeframe. We can't stop this."

"I could care less at this moment," Celeste said, reaching for the floor controls. Before she could do anything else, Evan grabbed her by the wrist. He pressed the "close door" button and then focused his attention on Celeste.

"I knew I needed to do this," he said as he shoved her to the wall. "Listen 'captain', I knew Echon Tarkin was on Eriadu. He had answered the door." Evan reached into his back pocket and removed his case of syringes. "I drugged him and took him onboard this ship. You know why? So I could convince you to keep going through with the mission, that's why." He removed one of the syringes. "So, 'captain', what will it be?" Celeste stared at him, fearful of what Evan was about to do.

"I-I can't let Echon come to harm," Celeste answered. Evan frowned.

"Shame it has to come to this," Evan said. He quickly lunged forward and stabbed her in the neck, injecting her with a sedative. Though his mission parameters said to kill her if things went sour he couldn't bear to do it. He quickly picked her up and pressed the button to bring them to her quarters. He stepped out of the turbolift and carried her over to her bed, laying her down gently. He moved a strand of hair from her unconscious face. She was so... Evan pulled his hand back. No, he didn't need to screw up his plan with unneeded fraternization. Evan walked back into the turbolift and headed for the main deck. Echon was now a liability and needed to dispose of him. He could alter the records and say he apart of the crew died with most of them. He'd get the same glory as Celeste, perhaps even more. Evan stepped out of the turbolift and headed towards the make-shift holding cell.

Down in the holding cell, Echon sat tied to a chair. From what he knew, two guards stood outside the door and prevented anyone from entering, or him from exiting of course. The last thing he had remembered was him getting injected by one of Celeste's cronies. The ropes were tied tight and the chair was made of metal, preventing him from freeing himself. He closed his eyes and tried to focus on the sounds around him. He could faintly hear the two guards talking about their mission but couldn't pick up on the location. There was some kind of sound coming from the vent near him. The injection point on his neck itched. Echon noticed a warped wall panel. If he could get over to it he might be able to cut his ropes loose. He shifted his weight and bounced a little towards it. Suddenly there was a banging on the door. "Keep it down in there will ya?" one of the guards said. Echon wasn't in the mood to get a beating so he stopped. The sound in the vent got louder. Suddenly the sound stopped. Then he heard a whistle, as if someone was trying to get his attention. Echon turned his head toward the vent. Sure enough, he saw Aurea's face in-between the gratings.

"Aurea!" he whispered. "What are you doing here?"

"Freeing you," she answered, struggling to get the grate off again. She stopped once she realized that it wasn't going to give. "I'm going to have to, you know," she said, making a pushing motion with her hands.

"Hold on," Echon said. "I'll move the chair right as you do it." Aurea nodded. Echon took a deep breath and once again bounced the chair. Aurea quickly let the Force rush out of her hands, causing the grate to give and fly off. The grate hit the wall with a loud thud. Echon winced, knowing that that was too much noise. Aurea quickly crawled out and ran over to Echon, untying his wrists.

"That's it!" the guard from before exclaimed. Echon quickly untied his other hand as Aurea grabbed the grate and hid in the corner. As the door opened the first guard immediately charged Echon as soon as he saw him free from his restraints. The second one started to charge as well but Aurea quickly threw the grate at the guard, striking him in the head. The first guard threw a punch, but Echon quickly dodged it, giving him an opening, but he had leaned too far in his dodge and found himself falling to the ground. Aurea quickly picked the grate up again and swung at the guard, hitting him right in the back. The guard reeled back in pain, which allowed Echon to leap up and deliver an uppercut to the guard's jaw, knocking him out. He shook out his wrist as Aurea started to bind the unconscious guards' hands with the restraints. Echon looked on as she checked the restraints to see if they were tight.

"You shouldn't have come for me," Echon said as soon as she was done. Aurea stood up and turned to face him.

"Where would I gone?" she asked, staring at him with her cold, lifeless eyes. Echon felt a shiver down his spine. He wasn't sure if she was using the Force to intimidate him or if it was the amount of guilt she was throwing at him. He finally turned his head away.

“We need to get off this ship,” he said, changing the subject. Aurea nodded. Echon picked up a stun baton off of one of the guards. *Why didn't they use these?* he mused. Before he could do anything else, Aurea grabbed Echon's shoulder.

“Someone's coming,” she said. She stared off in the direction of the incoming person. She could sense that it was the man who had taken Echon. Echon gripped the stun baton and prepared himself. He and Aurea quickly took cover on both sides on the door.

“Where'd those two bozos run off to?” Evan said as he approached the door to Echon's cell. He removed a syringe from his pack and opened the door. Right away he saw the two guards unconscious on the floor and Echon nowhere to be found. He stepped in without thinking, giving Echon a chance to strike. Echon struck Evan with the stun baton, sending an electric shock through his body. Evan fell to his knees, where Echon delivered a kick to Evan's ribs, but Evan was able to grab Echon by the ankle. He tried to twist Echon to the ground, but Echon was able to keep his ground. Aurea ran up to Evan to try to strike him, but her pant leg got caught on the loose grate, tripping her. Echon twisted his leg free and sent another kick to Evan's ribs. This one connected, briefly lifting Evan off the ground and onto his stomach. Echon dropped the stun baton and quickly leapt on top of Evan, but Evan shrugged him off. Evan stood up and struck Echon across the face with a left hook. Echon stumbled for a few seconds, trying to keep conscious. Aurea got up and charged Evan, but he grabbed her fist and threw her to the ground. Echon's balance returned and he threw a punch at Evan which connected with the right side of his face. Evan could taste blood. The inside of his mouth felt shredded. He threw a punch at Echon, but Echon was able to quickly dodge it. Aurea, tired of being on the ground, stood up once more and struck Evan square in the nose. That blow was it for Evan. he stumbled back and forth, before falling to the ground. Echon searched Evan's pockets and found his code cylinder and comlink. He plugged the cylinder into the comlink and downloaded the information onto it.

“Where's my stuff?” he asked, realizing that he had his own comlink in his bag.

“The cargo hold,” Aurea answered. Echon sighed. Most ships had their cargo holds in a low oxygen environment to prevent food from spoiling. And without oxygen tanks, they'd suffocate in minutes.

“Wait,” Echon said, realizing that something was amiss. “How'd you get onboard?” Aurea's face reddened.

“I snuck into the cargo hold,” she replied. “Someone found me and got into the medical bay.” Echon shook his head. Evan groaned. Echon drove an elbow into Evan's spine.

“That should keep him down,” Echon said. “You could've died, by the way. Don't do that again,” he chastised Aurea before opening the door. “Now come on, we need to get out of here.”

Back on the bridge, the crew prepared to depart from hyperspace. “Two minutes to hyperspace departure,” the pilot said. Oulu, the third in command –and current commanding officer– wavered in her seat. She was not fit to command the *Frayed Hunter*.

“Has anyone heard from either Captain Ial or Commander Zenete yet?” Oulu asked.

“We can’t reach the captain in her quarters and Zenete is nowhere to be found,” one of the crewmen said.

“Departing hyperspace in 3...” the pilot started to say. Suddenly the rush of colors stopped abruptly, leaving them with a blue-green planet sitting in the view of the cockpit. “Hyperspace travel ended prematurely due to gravity shift,” the pilot informed Oulu. “Records state that this is Voltar, third planet in the Tremulant system.” Oulu swallowed hard, noticing a fleet of ships heading their way.

“Incoming spacecrafts,” the radar officer said, stating the obvious.

“Lieutenant Commander, what are your orders?” the gunner asked. Oulu swallowed hard once more. The ships continued their approach. They were silver and were slender in shape. The cockpits appeared to look like the head of a creature, a Krayt dragon perhaps. Oulu was reminded of that time her father brought home the head of one from a hunt. 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.

“One of the ships is hailing us,” the communications officer informed. Oulu swallowed hard again. She was not ready for this. “I’ll open communications,” he said as he pressed a button.

“-open fire,” the message said. Oulu’s eyes widened.

“They’re about to attack!” she exclaimed. “Gunner, launch a counter attack on those ships now! Pilot, get us back into hyperspace!” The gunner nodded and took control of the turrets as the pilot charted an emergency course. One of the ships was swiftly blown to pieces. The other three ships quickly took evasive actions and opened fire on the *Frayed Hunter*. The ship rocked back and forth from blaster fire.

“It’s no good,” the pilot informed Oulu. “They must have a gravity-well or something activated.”

Echon and Aurea ran into the turbolift as a shockwave rocked the ship. “Captain’s quarters,” he said into the intercom. “You sure she’s up there?” he asked Aurea.

“I can see her up there,” she answered. “But her aura seems... faint.” The turbolift zoomed up and opened its doors once again to the captain’s barely furnished room. Echon ran up and saw Celeste sprawled out on the bed. He picked up her unconscious body and shook her.

“She might have had a spell cast on her,” Aurea said, a smile slowly forming on her face. “Maybe you should kiss her, to break the spell.” Echon’s heart skipped a beat. The thought of kissing his best friend was... not as repulsive as he thought it would be. If he needed to do it to break the spell, he’d do it. He leaned forward for the kiss but stopped at the last moment. He turned to Aurea, who at this time was sporting the biggest poodoo eating grin.

“A spell?” he said as he set Celeste down. “Really? How would a mere Imperial cast a ‘spell’? He made airquotes with his fingers. Aurea only chuckled. “I don’t know why I put up with you sometimes.” He returned his attention to Celeste. He couldn’t see anything wrong with her. The ship rocked violently again. They needed to get out of here fast. He picked Celeste back up and carried her over to the turbolift. “We’ll get in an escape pod and hope for the best,” he said as the lift made its way down to the main deck. The lift stopped on the cockpit, the doors opening to reveal Oulu and the rest of the crew.

“Who are you? And what happened to the captain?” Oulu asked, surprised to see Echon and Celeste.

“Echon Tarkin,” he replied. “And I don’t know what happened to her.”

“We’re abandoning ship Sir Tarkin,” Oulu informed him. Echon was taken aback by the formality. He never held that title. “You should as well.”

“Already was planning on it,” he replied. The entire crew piled into the turbolift and took it down to the main deck. The crowd rushed out to the escape pods and started to enter as many as they could into each one.

“Sir Tarkin,” Oulu said, directing him over to her. “This pod is for the captain. It has a specific emergency code so Imperial forces can find it.”

“Thanks,” Echon said as he brought Celeste into the pod with Aurea in tow. Oulu closed the door behind them and headed over to another pod.

“Lieutenant Commander!” Jensen exclaimed. “One of the pods launched is missing, may we join yours?”

“What do you mean missing?” she asked as Jensen and Jared got in.

“One of the escape pods jettisoned with one passenger earlier,” Jared replied. “We’re trying to fit the rest of us into the other pods.”

“Damn,” Oulu cursed as she closed the pod door. Once the last door shut, each pod’s door sealed itself. Then, one by one, each pod fired towards the surface of Voltar. Echon strapped Celeste into her seat and peered out the window. He watched as some of the escape pods were targeted by the enemy fighters.

“Where are we?” he asked.

“V-Voltar,” Celeste struggled to say. Echon turned to Celeste, surprised at her regaining consciousness and what she had said. The Volta were a rarely talked about force in the Outer rim. The Empire had once tried to invade the system only to be forced out by the inhabitants. Echon had been lucky to find a report on the invasion a few years back. The Volta utilized electronic disabling devices against the Empire, making bombing runs near impossible. They also had some type of “super-soldier” that could cut through stormtroopers like bantha butter. Echon looked outside again and started to think it would’ve been better to stay on the ship. That thought quickly disappeared as what appeared to be a space station or some kind of battleship fired upon the *Frayed Hunter*. The lights on the ship flickered on and off for a few seconds before they shut off. Gravity had already taken a hold of it and the disabled vehicle suck into the atmosphere. The pod quickly followed suit and Echon sat in his seat and strapped himself in. Aurea struggled with the straps. The pod began to rock violently. She knew that if she didn’t hurry, she’d bounce around the walls. She tried to clip the buckle but she couldn’t force it in. Echon noticed Aurea’s predicament and unstrapped himself. He went over and forced the buckle. Before he could breathe his sigh of relief, the pod hit a pocket of turbulence and Echon flew up and smashed his head on the hard metal ceiling, immediately blacking out.