

## **The Thessalonica Legacy**

### **Chapter 10: Princess Celestia**

Princess Celestia stepped forward as she addressed her subjects. Her movements were deliberate and graceful, and highly calculated.

“My dear little ponies,” she adopted a sweet motherly tone, “Would you mind so terribly as to wait outside? I wish to speak to our guests privately.” The ponies bowed and nodded, then turned for the door. “Please, stay, Twilight Sparkle. I wish for my ambassador to be present at this meeting. And you, too, Spike. We may have need of a scribe.”

Twilight’s heart skipped a beat, but she turned and trotted to the side of the Princess. Spike ran to fetch a quill and paper, just in case, then took his place beside Twilight. The humans found themselves alone on one side of the room facing the Equestrian delegation.

The Princess raised her head high and spoke in a clear, strong voice, “I am Princess Celestia. Along with my sister, Princess Luna, We rule over all of the lands of Equestria and ensure peace and harmony for all Our subjects. *You* are interlopers in Our kingdom. Who speaks for you?”

The bald-headed man with the bushy mustache stepped forward, “I am Captain Edgar Tartaglia of the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns. I command the Federated Suns DropShip *Felicity Klimkosky* attached to the Valexa March Militia. I speak for Princess-Regent Yvonne Steiner-Davion and all mankind.” His knees felt weak, but he forced himself to stand tall. He didn’t really have the authority to speak on behalf of House Davion and the government of the FedSuns he knew, but desperate times called for desperate measures.

Princess Celestia raised her brow, “Yvonne Steiner-Davion? So, does Joseph Cameron no longer sit on the throne of the Terran Hegemony?”

Shock flashed across Tartaglia’s face, “Joseph Cameron?” He thought hard, trying to recall the name, “But he was assassinated in 2549. That was over five hundred years ago!”

Celestia hummed knowingly, “Assassinated, hmm. What a shame. And tell me, what has become of the Terran Hegemony?”

Tartaglia was confused. This was all ancient history as far as they were all concerned. “The Hegemony was disbanded following the collapse of the Star League in the 2780s.”

“Accompanied by much suffering and strife, I presume?”

The Succession Wars had been fought for centuries. They were some of the most destructive wars in human history. Countless planets had been ravaged and numberless lives lost. In the darkest days, technology and manufacturing capacity had been so savaged, the future of mankind as a spacefaring species was seriously in doubt. Though the LosTech, the slang term for

high technology lost since the glory days of the Star League, had mostly been recovered and even surpassed in recent decades, in many ways the Succession Wars were still being fought.

“Yes,” Tartaglia replied simply. He took the opportunity of Celestia’s pause to ask a question of his own, “If I may ask, Your Majesty, how is it you know of our ancient history?”

“Is it not obvious? Your kind has visited our land before.” Celestia peered down her nose at him, her tone turned ominous, “Although, I must say, the last time your kind did not make themselves particularly welcome.”

“What?! But when? How?” the exclamation came from Corporal Liz Virat. Remembering her place, she snapped her mouth shut but kept her eyes wide.

“I think Twilight Sparkle might be able to answer that.” Celestia turned to her prized student.

It took a moment for Twilight to find herself, “About 550 years ago, or thereabouts, pony astronomers observed a strange light moving through the sky. It is said it coincided with the ‘Visitation of Thessalonica.’ I observed a similar light shortly before your arrival outside Ponyville.” She looked to Princess Celestia for encouragement, “I suspect, the moving light may have been an orbiting spaceship, and that it was named the *Thessalonica*.”

Celestia nodded, pleased with her student’s deduction, “Indeed it was. It was precisely 534 years ago the *Thessalonica* landed near what is now Fillydelphia. I remember because it was two months past the 466th anniversary of Nightmare Moon’s banishment.” She smiled sadly at Princess Luna who bit her lip and looked away. “The occupants of that vessel were traders from the Terran Hegemony based out of Epsilon Indi. They claimed their ship suffered a ‘miss jump’ and were stranded. Now, I ask you, Captain Edgar Tartaglia of the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns, what brings you here to our kingdom?”

Tartaglia’s veins felt as if they were filled with ice, “We, ah. Our JumpShip suffered a misjump and our K-F drive suffered damage in the event,” he said weakly.

“I see.” Celestia glared at the humans. The air seemed to crackle and each one of them was gripped with gnawing fear in the pit of their stomachs, “The humans on the *Thessalonica* were quite friendly at first. I allowed them to freely interact with my subjects.” Her eyes narrowed, “They proved themselves to be quite... disruptive.”

Tartaglia swallowed hard. He was on the defensive and he didn’t like it. He wanted to apologize. He wanted to promise that they wouldn’t cause any problems, promise that *they* would be different. He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came.

“You humans bring with you discord. You are divisive and warlike. Violence, vice, and greed follow you wherever you go. Did you know some of your predecessors attempted to *steal* some of my subjects? Keep them as *pets*? Do you know what they did then? They fought

amongst themselves. Humans killed one another on *my* land and among *my* people!” Celestia’s pink eyes flashed and the air seemed to grow unbearably warm. Twilight was terrified; she had never seen Celestia like this before. She had always been the picture of compassion and understanding. To see her like this filled her with dread.

“Equestria is harmony, Captain Edgar Tartaglia. Equestria is order. We are in tune with nature. We control nature. The very winds and rains obey our every whim. The sun shines and the moon rises because *we* will it.” She was standing nose-to-nose with the tall Captain. The whiskers under his nose quivered as his chest heaved. She continued, “Humans are agents of chaos. You come from a place where nature is not organized, where magic does not infuse the very essence of the universe. You bring this chaos with you with your grievances and your wars. You and the world you come from represent everything Equestria stands against.”

All of a sudden, the fiery goddess of the sun subsided. Her fierce countenance melted to one of amiable friendship, a warm smile graced her lovely face. The fear gripping the human’s innards subsided, replaced by a warm glow of the summer sun.

“Still, you’re not *all* bad. You are a creative, industrious, and inquisitive people. I learned much from you. You value friendship, honesty, and virtue. Your art is lovely and you’ve provided some wonderful seeds for our glorious civilization. For all the trouble your kind caused, Equestria is better for it, as I believe my sister will attest.” She paused, but Tartaglia felt it was not his turn to speak.

“I do believe it would be best,” she concluded, “that you, your people, and your ship depart from Equestria as soon as feasible. To speed you on your way, I shall provide what assistance I can. So tell me, what do you require?”

Tartaglia was silent for a long while. He was still digesting what he had heard. All of them were. He couldn’t argue. Human history was rife with suffering and death. Most school history books read as much as a tabulation of wars as a listing of social change, if not more.

“I’m told the damage to the K-F drive is minimal,” he said at last. “There are a handful of simple metal parts we would need fabricated, mostly bolts and a covering plate. Some wires. The main thing would be helium.”

“Helium?” the Princess asked, almost amused

“Yes, your highness. We require a...significant volume of liquefied helium to cool the boom so we can enter hyperspace.” He waved a hand towards the white-coat clad woman behind him, “Dr. Langley has the specifications.”

“Is that all?” Celestia asked, “Just some metal parts and a quantity of helium?”

“Well, honestly, no. We do still have one more problem,” he rubbed the back of his neck with his hand.

“And that would be?”

“We... don’t know exactly where we are. Even with an operational K-F drive, we wouldn’t know how to get home.”

“I see,” said Princess Celestia, “Well, I am afraid I cannot help you there, but I do know where you might find answers. You see, after I requested the *Thessalonica* leave Equestria, they settled far away on the southern continent. I do not know all that befell them, but I do know where they settled.”

Now there was a lucky break. Star League and Hegemony technology was renowned for being extremely tough. If they could find a data crystal or a memory core they may find some information on where they were. And if they could find out where they were, they could work out how to get back.

“And now if you’ll excuse me, I wish to speak to my ambassador. You may wait upstairs. I regret that I cannot allow you to leave the Library, but do not fret. You are in no danger and will come to no harm. If it flatters you, this temporary confinement is more for the safety of my subjects than for yours. Spike, if you could please accompany them, you can transcribe the doctor’s list of required parts.”

Without a word, the six humans and the diminutive dragon moved slowly up the stairs and into Twilight’s personal quarters. The door shut behind them, propelled at distance by Celestia.

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Microgravity always made repairs more difficult. Jean-Jacques had disassembled the entire navigation computer, had run diagnostics on each and every component, and had found nothing wrong. Captain Mawsley held on to a restraining strap on the bridge of the *Silvertongue* as she watched her chief technician install the final piece and reconnect the power supplies. The bridge was empty except for herself, Jean-Jacques as the helmsman strapped into his console.

“Here goes nothing,” the helmsman said as they keyed in the commands. A tense half-minute passes as they awaited the results. “Looks like it’s working flawlessly,” he said, watching diagnostic lines scroll by on his holographic display.

The computer finished its search of the surrounding stars. It matched known constellations to an immense database to calculate their position with pinpoint accuracy. At the helmsman’s command, it also factored in solar system data they had been collecting while the navigation computer was offline. The results printed out on the display.

Mawsley’s heart sank. It was the same impossible result they had been getting.

“The computer is working perfectly. The stars match exactly. Even the positions of the

moon and the other planets match precisely *for this exact date*. There's no question about it, Captain. That *is* our location." Jean-Jacques words were not what she wanted to hear.

"But it just can't be," she clenched her eyes shut, willing the display to change. "Look out that window. Look at that planet. There is no possible way *that is* Terra."

The technician remained unmoved, his good eye completely emotionless, "And yet, it is. It may not look it, but somehow that *is* Earth."

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As soon as the humans were tucked away out of sight, Princess Celestia let out a relieved sigh. She folded her majestic wings neatly at her side, their imposing psychological effect no longer needed.

"Well done, Twilight Sparkle. I don't know of any other pony that would have managed to convince six human military to not only voluntarily submit to confinement, but also sneak them into town completely undetected." She smiled warmly at her pupil, the pride unmistakable in her soft eyes. "Maybe I should name you my permanent ambassador."

Twilight rushed forward and buried her face in her mentor's shoulder. The Princess dropped her head and nuzzled her student, draping a long, slender foreleg across her quaking shoulders.

"Oh, Princess, I'm so sorry!" Twilight sobbed. She tried to choke back the tears which were welling in her eyes, but some managed to squeeze through and moisten her face and, to her embarrassment, the Princess's shoulder.

"Why whatever for, child?" the living goddess easily adopted the tone of a caring mother comforting a small child.

"I didn't know they were so dangerous!" she buried her face deeper into the crux of Celestia's neck. "If I had known, I would never have invited them here. I wouldn't...I wouldn't have spent so much time around them! I would have kept the others away!" the tears were flowing more freely now. She hated for her teacher and sovereign to see her like this, blubbing like a little filly.

Princess Celestia seemed completely unperturbed by the display. She cooed and soothed her student. Her horn barely glowing, she retrieved a paper handkerchief from a box thoughtfully kept near the tragedy and romance section of the library. She dabbed Twilight's eyes and dried her tears with infinite tenderness.

"Now, I'm afraid I do have one further task for you, my faithful student," Celestia said, her tone becoming more serious. "I wish for you to learn as much as you possibly can about these humans."

Twilight was quite taken aback, “What? But you said they were dangerous!”

Celestia nodded, “Indeed I did, and they can be, especially if they feel threatened or if they have something to gain. Everything I said to them was true, and I believe they know it. But,” she looked up at her sister, “learning from them has proven most fruitful in the past.”

“I think I understand,” said Twilight softly, “You’re talking about the, the... changes that occurred in art and architecture and such. That’s what I’d been studying before I saw the light in the sky.”

Celestia looked genuinely surprised, “Why, Twilight Sparkle! You really are a brilliant little pony! I didn’t realize anypony in the last few centuries had ever noticed that. Yes, indeed, the arrival of the humans did precipitate some rather radical changes in pony civilization.”

Twilight felt the rush of a mystery solved. She had started to suspect as much after the Princess’s last letter, but to have it confirmed made her little heart swell with pride at having figured it out. But even as she reveled in this small victory of academia, her head swam with more questions, only a small fraction of which tumbled forth into a fervent articulation.

Princess Celestia gently shushed the animated little bookworm. “The ponies were created to act as the agents of order in the world,” she intoned, “and it’s a job they do very well. Among all the benefits of their purpose, ponies for the most part enjoy a happy, largely care-free existence. Within the borders of Equestria, they generally do not have to worry about such things as predators or wars. There hasn’t been a standing army in Equestria in a millennium. Most ponies alive today probably barely even know what a ‘soldier’ is. I believe your report to me on the border incident in Apple-loosa indicated the skirmish was fought largely with pies?”

Twilight chuckled at the memory. It was fortunate nopony was hurt, or no bison for that matter. She was also grateful a peaceful and amiable solution had been found.

“My point is,” Celestia continued, “my subjects are content. Contentment makes for happy lives, but it does not breed ingenuity. Oh there have been wonderfully visionary ponies over the years, but their talents mostly lie with art or magic. Occasionally there’s an inventor or an innovator, but they’re usually concerned with convenience.

“But the human world is quite different. Their world has never seen *true* long-term peace and stability. They are never content, so they *constantly* invent and innovate. With no magic, they rely on technology to do everything from sending a letter long distances to creating beautiful art.”

Twilight absorbed every word the Princess told her. She begged Celestia to continue, “So that explains why pony architecture and art styles and such would stay relatively consistent for long periods of time, but I still don’t see how the humans factor in to the sudden change?”

“If there is one thing ponies do well, its mimic those they admire. When the *Thessalonica* landed, the ponies were enraptured with the occupants. You may have seen some of this among your friends in their interactions with this bunch of humans.”

Twilight thought. Her friends did seem to be very tolerant of the humans. Well, except for Applejack, who did seem genuinely afraid. “Is it some sort of spell? Some magical connection?” she asked.

“No, no spell. It’s not really anything intrinsic to the humans, either. It has more to do with pony nature. Ponies are an inquisitive lot themselves. When they find something that fascinates them, they tend to focus on it intently. This is rather esoteric magical theory, but it is related to how cutie marks work.”

Twilight looked at her own flank and the pink-and-white cutie mark adorning it. Every pony gained his or her cutie mark upon finding something that could be considered their life’s calling. For some it was a something concrete, like a musical instrument or a special talent. For others it was more abstract, more of a philosophy or personality trait that sparked their cutie mark. Most ponies thought that cutie marks were pre-ordained, and that one had to find what set them apart from everypony else to discover it. But if it was related more to what fascinated them, then maybe what cutie mark appeared could be variable given upbringing. Was a particular cutie mark part of a pony’s nature from foaling, or could a particular mark be obtained via nurturing the foal in a certain environment? Twilight cut off that line of thought. She couldn’t afford any distractions right now, but she did make a mental note to pick that investigation up later.

Princess Celestia continued her history lesson, “The ponies copied much of what they saw in the humans. Much of the tools we use, the styles of our architecture, even certain aspects of how we grow our food were borrowed directly from the humans.” Twilight thought of the hammer and how that awkward tool would fit perfectly in a human hand. “Even the names of many of our towns are actually puns on human words. Fillydelphia, Manehattan, even Canterlot.”

Twilight asked what they were puns of. Though Celestia told her, she did confess she only knew that they were names of human cities, except for Camelot which she personally chose to mimic due to its status as the mythical seat of power of a great king.

“I must say, I do believe the change has been for the better.” The soft voice belonged to Princess Luna, who had finally decided to speak. Nightmare Moon had been banished a thousand years ago, long before the arrival of the *Thessalonica*. Poor Luna must have suffered quite the culture shock. The little blue Princess continued, “It’s so much more exciting now! So many new things. Fans and carriages and ovens. The food tastes better and populations are so much higher!”

Princess Celestia gave her little sister a loving nuzzle, “Indeed. In fact, I wanted to send these humans off post-haste. It was Luna here who argued we should try and learn more from them. Maybe carefully select certain aspects of their culture and technology to introduce to

society. An introduction of controlled chaos, if you will. These humans have had an additional five hundred years. Who knows what further wonders they have developed.”

She then outlined her plan to Twilight. They would hold the helium the humans requested as collateral on the condition that Twilight travel with them when they venture off to find the remains of the *Thessalonica*, as Celestia was certain they would. She would serve as the Official Royal Liaison and Ambassador, and would attempt to learn as much about their society as she could. Upon her safe return, the helium would be delivered to the humans, and the two peoples would go their separate ways.

“There is one last question I have, Princess,” Twilight hesitated, not knowing if she should continue, “Why, if the arrival of humans in the *Thessalonica* was so influential, is there almost no mention of them in any book I could find?”

Princess Celestia’s eyes fell. “That would be my doing,” she said apologetically, “After one of them murdered another and I requested they leave Equestria, I sort of flew off the handle. I was so angry, I had every mention of humans and their arrival expunged from all the records. It took a great deal of effort and some very powerful spells. With some judicious effort, within a couple generations, they had been almost entirely forgotten. Though it does seem I missed one reference. *Stardust Sprinkle’s Systematic Guide to Stellar Spectacles* was it?” Twilight’s heart skipped a beat, but Celestia just smiled wryly, “I think I’ll let that one slide, though.”

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Spike couldn’t understand all the words the humans, and especially Private Ackermann, were using, but he had a feeling they would come in very useful for annoying the hell out of Twilight later. And getting his mouth washed out with soap. He tried to ignore them and focus on what the redheaded doctor was dictating to him.

Ackermann tried the door to the balcony for the umpteenth time. Once again, it was stuck tight. He cursed and cursed again. He paced the floor like a caged wildcat, stalking up to each window in turn. He tried each one again and again, always finding them closed fast, and always eliciting another expletive.

“This is bullshit. They can’t keep us locked up like this. They’re a bunch of goddamned horses. They’re animals! We’re people! We should be locking them up!”

“Give it a rest, Ackermann,” called an exasperated Ling from the corner where he propped himself up, trying to catch up on lost sleep.

Ackermann ignored the officer, “This isn’t right. This isn’t natural. I can’t believe we just walked in and let them lock us up!”

“If we’re locked up, then why did they let us keep our weapons?” Corporal Virat asked without looking up. She had tried a couple books, but found the text indecipherable. She was



now curled up on Twilight's bed casually flipping through a book of pictures. She was admiring a pretty illustration of a pastoral scene. Stylistically, it was lavish, but flat, lacking much in the way of perspective. It reminded her of a holovid she had seen once of an illumination from an ancient Terran manuscript dating from back when knights rode out from castles on mighty steeds. There were no humans in this picture, of course. A group of ponies looked to be getting ready for a party while in the midground sat a small village of tiny huts by a small river, and in the background loomed the unmistakable outline of the cantilevered fairytale castle in the mountains. She idly wondered if the village was meant to be the one they were currently in.

"It's 'cause they're too stupid to know any better, that's why," Ackermann ranted, "We should be the rightful rulers of this place. Those animals should bow to us. With what we have, we could be living like kings in a week!"

"I hope you're not referring to my *Valkyrie* in your assessment," Ramirez crossed his arms as he stood against the wall. "There's no way I'd let you use *my* 'Mech to start a holy war against these people's—yes I said people—living goddess."

"She's not a goddess," Ackermann said with a dismissive wave of his hand "She's got them all duped with that whole raising the sun routine. She's just a con-artist like all the other politicians." Tartaglia raised an eyebrow at this declaration.

"Even so, she's the center of their government and spirituality..."

Ackermann's face went dark, "Don't you dare talk to me about spirituality," he hissed.

"Oh, give it a rest, Ackermann!" called Liz from her spot on the bed, "Not everything is about religion. Hell, I'm Buddhist, the Lieutenant's Jewish, Ramirez is... uh... What are ya', Sarge?"

"My family's New Avalon Catholic," Ramirez said, not actually answering the question.

"There ya' go. And we all get along just fine without getting up in each other's faces about whose view of the universe is the right one all the time. These ponies have their own worldview, let's let them have it and not start some damn holy war," she returned to the picturebook, "It's not like we don't have one of those on our hands already thanks to those damn robe-wearin' Word of Blake fanatics." She had lost family in the ComStar splinter group's surprise attack on New Avalon—a battle that was ongoing nearly a year later, and a distant cousin in the bombardment of the Lyran capitol on Tharkad. She held a very personal grudge against the Blakists and their weird technology-idolizing spirituality. Given half a chance, she would gladly march against them and their holy war against all the Inner Sphere.

The Corporal's contribution ended, Ackerman changed tack in his rant, "And what about none of these little horsey-people knowing about humans, huh? If we've been here before, what happened to them? *She* must have killed 'em all, otherwise they'd still be running this place."

“Shut up, Ackermann.” Tartaglia said what they were all thinking. They had grown weary of his tirade.

“Though she did have one good idea. I say after we take over, we round up these little bastards and sell them as pets. Can you imagine what those rich snobs would pay for one of them on Argyle, or Kestrel, or hell even Coventry and Tharkad!”

“Shut up, Ackermann.” Tartaglia intoned again.

“Of course that’s assuming we get off the rock to begin with, what with us walking right into this trap and all...”

“Goddamnit, Ackerman, SHUT UP!” Tartaglia leapt to his feet.

“Why should I listen to you? *You* lead us into this mess in the first...”

The Captain towered over the insubordinate Private and poked him hard in the chest with a long, bony finger. “You *will* listen to me because I am your commanding officer!” his face and bald head turning a bright shade of purple, “We are closer to getting off this rock and back home now than we have been at any time since we wound up here, and I’m not about to have some rocks-for-brains militiaman screw it all up! Now sit down, and SHUT. UP.”

Private Ackermann looked as if we were about to say something he would regret, then closed his mouth and walked determinedly to a corner of the room. Grumbling under his breath, he slumped heavily against the wall.

There was a knock and Twilight Sparkle trotted up the stairs and into the room. “Captain Tartaglia?” she said in as professional and important a voice as she could muster, “If I could have a word with you in private, I would like to discuss arrangements for our journey to the southern continent.”

[<Previous](#) ----- Ch. 10 ----- [Next>](#)

[1](#) | [2](#) | [3](#) | [4](#) | [5](#) | [6](#) | [7](#) | [8](#) | [9](#) | [10](#) | [11](#) | [12](#) | [13](#) | [14](#) | [15](#) | [16](#) | [17](#)  
| [Epilogue](#) | [Glossary & Author’s Notes](#) |