

STAR THE DREADFUL CHIMAERA WARS

BY VA HAWKINS

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Admiral Dempsey sat in her chambers aboard the Hammer, eschewing the bridge for the time being. She knew her crew well enough to know they were quite capable without her direct management. She had a wider strategy to review. The map of the Doldur nebula, the site for current training exercises, glowed blue before her eyes, suspended in the middle of the room by the holographic projectors creating it. She tracked known Imperial and civilian vessels, reported locations of the Warrior and her squadrons, and a variety of unidentified sensor ghosts. In this nebula they could be nothing, or they could be the vessels he was hunting.

It frustrated her that the Warrior was already in combat. Reports were that barely had the training mission started than Admiral Plif's ship had encountered training drones. That was barely minutes ago, and yet she still felt that the Warrior now had the head start. A suspicious woman would have held that somehow the contest was being rigged in the favour of the Warrior, but Dempsey was beyond such internal squabbling. More likely was the fact that the Warrior's squadrons were not geared for repelling direct assaults. Theta Flight I were flying Landing craft – hardly a close defence ship. This weakness had probably been designed to be exploited within the training operation.

However, this raised a question as to what weakness would the Hammer be tested on? From Alpha's Missile Boats through to Epsilon's TIE Advanced, there was little the Hammer was not equipped to deal with. Even the lack of obvious target suited the Hammer – Delta was the Corps dedicated reconnaissance squadron. Perhaps things weren't as stacked in favour of the Warrior after all. Dempsey smiled, only moments before the deck beneath her buckled so violently she was thrown in the air, crashing into the ceiling.

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Dempsey struggled to her feet, her ears ringing and her vision clouded by the blood pouring into her eyes from a deep wound to her forehead. The noise had been deafening. Something had gone very, very wrong. The deck plating had become uneven, bent and buckled by the force of whatever had just happened. An explosion? Was this an attack? There had been no warning. Dempsey struggled to the bridge, at one point having to use her light sabre to cut her way through a hatchway that now refused to open. She found the bridge had suffered much as she had. Several officers were still on the floor, whilst others tended to their

injuries. Dempsey seemed to be the only one standing on her own two feet. She pulled herself up to her full height, forcing her head to clear. A show of strength was needed to stop her crew from wavering.

“All stations, Report!” she barked.

“Admiral,” an officer replied, propping himself up against a console unit, “What happened?”

Dempsey flashed a hard stare towards the officer. “If you don’t get to your station and report, then we won’t know will we? Move. Now! I ordered you to report!”

Several stations called in, firmness and purpose taking over from groans of pain and injury. Damage control was last.

“Massive explosion reported, rear section of the bridge tower. Main hull has taken minimal damage. Casualties seem restricted to bridge crew. Several injuries, some severe, but no fatalities. Medical is still fully operational, Med-teams are on their way.”

“What was the source of the explosion? Are we under attack?” Dempsey asked.

“Scanners are clear,” a bridge officer replied. “No ships, hostile or friendly, on scanners, no indications of cloaked ships or warhead trails.”

“Admiral,” the Engineering officer cut in. “There is nothing in that section of the bridge that could cause such an explosion. This cannot have been a malfunction.”

“Sabotage?” Dempsey asked.

“Possibly, Admiral,” the engineering officer replied.

Dempsey’s head spun, and not just from what she suspected was a significant concussion. What was this? Was THIS the training exercise for the Hammer? Or was this a genuine act of terrorism? Did that even matter?

“Report the situation to the Challenge. Report that we are still operational and proceeding with the mission. Engineering, I need a new operations room. My chambers are no longer suitable. I want one operational within 30 minutes, understood?”

“Yes, Admiral!” the engineer unsteadily turned and began giving orders to his crews. Med teams began to arrive on the bridge. Dempsey was pleased the response had been so quick. Even under such unusual circumstances, her crew was responding well. But suspicion drove a subtle knife into her satisfaction. If this was not part of the exercise, then there was a real possibility that there was a saboteur on board the Hammer. Had she been so focused on finding their targets outside of the ship she had neglected seeking any under her very nose?

“Security! Main briefing room, 2 minutes!” Dempsey ordered, and turned without waiting for a response, striding away, doing her best to appear purposeful, despite her own injuries. Besides, she didn’t want to give any med team the idea that she needed to be sent to the medical bay. She was well enough aware that she needed a long soak in a bacta bath, but she was damned if she was going to bob about in one of those tubes whilst a saboteur could be loose on her ship. Injuries could wait.