



STAR WARS

THE DREADFUL CHIMAERA

By VA Hawkins

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Admiral Plif was not pleased.

He had just lost two of his squadrons at the urgent request of Fleet Admiral Pellaeon, right in the middle of his manoeuvres against the drone-filled Mon Calamari Cruisers. Theta and Kappa had been redeployed to the Aggressor for reasons he apparently didn't have sufficient clearance to be informed of. Secrecy within the Corps wasn't unusual, but to exclude the Commodore of the current flagship of the Corps was highly irregular, and it didn't sit well with Plif. Still, his not to reason why. Now, he was tasked with completing the mission with Sin and Sigma. He had no doubt that the two squadrons were more than up to the task, but it left him without the utterly overwhelming force he was used to commanding. However, the two squadrons were now in space, and exceeding even his highest expectations. Wing II never let him down, even at half strength.

"Plif to Sigma and Sin squadrons. We have these drones at our mercy. Drive home the attack, and make the kill."

The replies from LC Eode and COL Wraith were short and efficient, their attention firmly fixed on securing victory for the Warrior. Once again putting the pilots of the ISD Hammer in her place would simply be a pleasant bonus Plif was *sure* hadn't even crossed their minds...

Plif watched as the tactical display processed the fleet movements around the Warrior. His two squadrons were now closing in on the drone-cruiser, sheparding the enemy fighters into tighter formations around their mothership, reducing their manoeuvrability and ensuring even stray shots would likely impact the enemy capital ship. However, the battle had moved. The cruiser had been making a steady retreat, deeper into the heart of the red nebula that surrounded them. If he allowed this to continue, the action would creep dangerously far away. Better to close the gap.

"Helm, move the Warrior closer. I want a clear view for the kill." Plif ordered.

"Sir..." a confused voice interrupted, "Admiral, Sir, two squadrons of TIE Bombers have just *jumped* in behind us."

Plif turned to look at the tactical officer.

“Jumped?” he asked.

“Yes, Sir. I’m not aware of any hyper-capable bombers currently in active service in the Corps. Recommend immediate response.” The officer replied.

Plif hastily returned to his tactical display. The bombers were closing fast. That in itself spoke of the fact that something was very amiss. ‘Fast’ was not a term used in the same sentence as Bombers without the word ‘not’ featuring prominently. Their timing was impeccable. Too impeccable, to be precise. Even a cursory glance showed that even the speedy missileboats would not intercept the bombers before they were at optimum firing range.

Time seemed to slow to a crawl. Conflicting decisions danced in Plif’s head. Was this more of the drill? Or was this a new threat? Should the front line squads be recalled, or allowed to complete their mission first? The hesitation lasted only a moment.

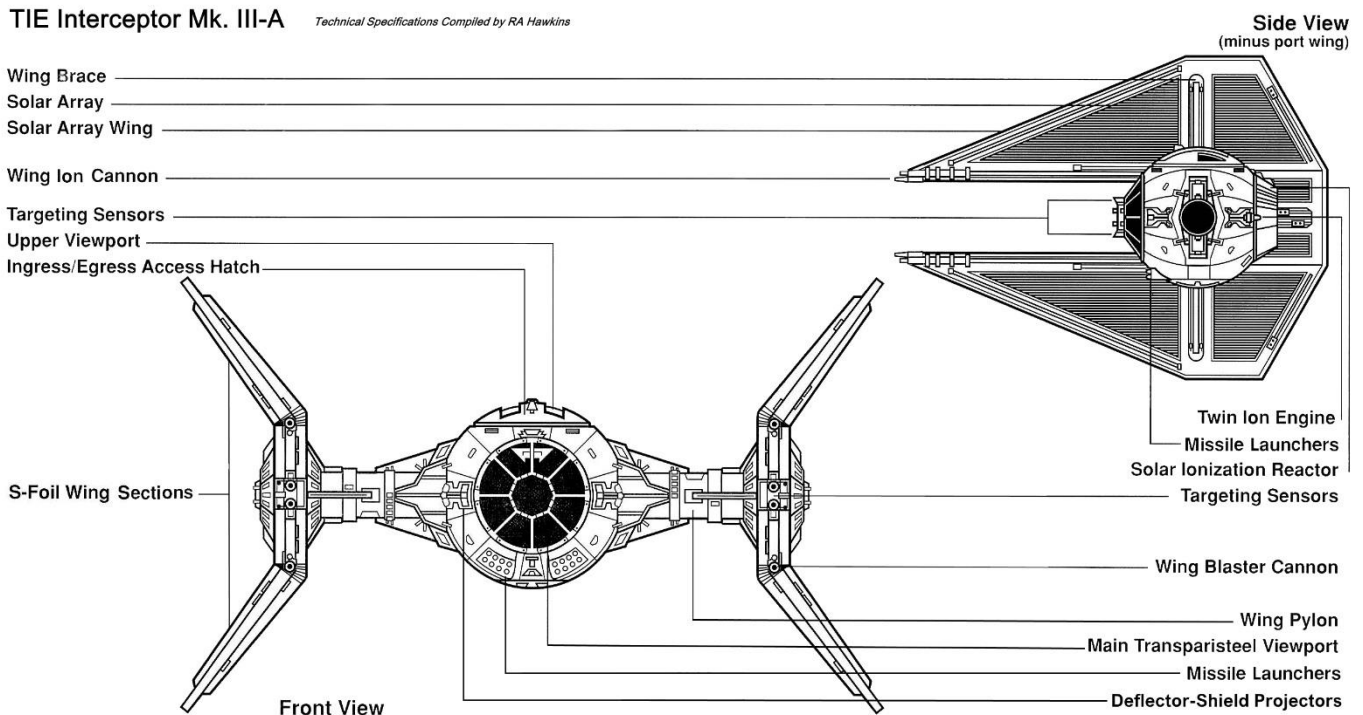
“Tactical, launch the Mk. III Interceptors – Eta and Iota squadrons.” Plif commanded, his voice full of stern authority. “Full emergency deployment procedures. Set red alert throughout the ship. We must assume this is a genuine attack.”

“Comms,” Plif continued, “Signal Sigma and Sin, tell them to stop wasting time, destroy the cruiser and drones, and get back to defend the Warrior. Let’s compete the mission AND show these intruders just who they are dealing with.”

The Mk. III Interceptor was a new asset within the fleet. Inferior to the Defenders and Advanced fighters of the frontline squadrons, they were still a marked improvement on the original Interceptor design. They had much of the speed of the TIE Advanced, having a modified version of their engines, yet exchanged some firepower for versatility. Two of the Interceptor’s lasers were replaced with Ion cannons, allowing them to act in a greater range of roles. They could intercept and disable even the quickest of the standard Rebel fighters, and built in warhead launchers allowed them the firepower to deal with everything up to small capital ships. They were, however, relatively untested in battle, their installation into secondary squadrons within the Corps still new. Plif would now be relying on these ships to intercept an enemy force who so far seemed to defy all he knew of Imperial vessel design. He was confident they would prove up to the task!

TIE Interceptor Mk. III-A

Technical Specifications Compiled by RA Hawkins



“Multiple warhead launches detected, Admiral!” The tactical officer called.

“All crew brace for impact! Get those damned fighters into vacuum! I want at least one of these krelling ships disabled and in our hanger within 10 minutes.” Plif barked. Seconds later, he was all but thrown from his feet. Multiple rocket impacts shook the ship, even through her powerful shields.

“Iota has launched, Eta will launch imminently.” Tactical reported.

“Good. Make these Bombers pay for daring to attack a ship of the Emperor’s Hammer!”

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Plif sat in his office, reviewing the damage report. Major hull breaches on several decks; multiple turbolaser and launcher banks damaged or destroyed; one shield generator torn from its mountings; and two main engines inoperative. Miraculously, the hyperdrive and minimal thrusters remained operational, and the Starfighter launch systems remained intact. The Warrior was damn fortunate to still be operational, and not a heap of scrap floating listlessly through space.

“Admiral, may I speak frankly?” the General Frown asked. Frown had spent the engagement thus far down on the fighter bays, berating any and all who fell beneath his gaze, whipping the crew into a frenzy of zealous activity with his barbed words. It has taken the surprise appearance of hyper-capable, high speed bombers to draw him away from his beloved, and simultaneously despised, fighter squadrons. There was no one quite like Frown, Plif mused.

“Go ahead, General.” Plif had a deep respect for Frown, despite his sullen nature. He would value the Wing Commander’s take on the situation.

“Admiral, I assume you have reached the same conclusion as I?” Frown asked. Damn him, he’s showing off that he’s spotted something.

Plif sighed, scowling slightly. “Frown, just out with it. We don’t have time for your usual pomp and ceremony.”

“As you wish, Sir,” Said Frown, not an ounce of emotion in his words. Always the consummate professional, Plif recognised.

“We have been intentionally left wounded.” Frown’s proclamation on the matter was intriguing.

“Explain,” Plif commanded.

“Sir, those bombers had us where they wanted us. They arrived firmly in our blind spot, and were quite capable of reducing our engine blocks to molten slag, had they wished. They could have even destroyed us, I suspect. Their positioning was favourable for such an outcome. And yet here we are. Bloodied, yet unbowed. We are hyper-capable, have half shields, basic manoeuvring capacity, and enough functioning weaponry to warrant our continuation in the field, especially with our fighter bays curiously untouched.”

Plif considered Frown’s words. He had put much faith in Iota and Eta, and they had not disappointed him. Even as Frown and he spoke, the captured bomber was being carefully scrutinised. Four bombers had made it back to hyperspace before Sin and Sigma had arrived to re-enforce the Mk. IIIs. The new Interceptor design had proven itself in battle, taking out well over half of the attacking bombers before the more advanced fighters had arrived to finish the job, their own mission completed. He had found himself thankful that whatever auto-destruct system was aboard the bomber had failed. Now they had a chance to find out where these cursed ships came from, or at least the ability to explore how they were modified so effectively. He nodded to himself; Frown took this as a signal to continue.

“Admiral, we have been intentionally spared. Some wishes us to be able to continue to act in this sector, but to do so weakened. I am concerned of the timing as well. If there was a perfect moment to launch such an attack, it was that very one, Sir. I have reviewed the battle logs. At no other point in the engagement were Sigma or Sin further from being able to respond. There is a deeper plot at work here, Sir, one we cannot yet discover. We should proceed with all due caution.” He finished.

“So you feel we should proceed? Not return to our home systems for repair?”

Frown seemed genuinely offended and shocked at the very suggestion!

“Sir, that would be utterly unacceptable! We are the Warrior!” Frown was almost flustered. But not quite.

“We are indeed. And we will proceed, be reassured on that front! I want to find whoever sent these bombers. If you are right, and I find myself seeing the logic of your summation, this could present a considerable threat to the Corps, or a raising of the bar in the deviousness of the training exercises our commanders dream up. Care to hazard a guess as to which?” Plif asked.

“I find the deviousness of our admirals knows no bounds, Sir.” Said Frown, very respectfully.

“Then, onwards, General. The only way is through!”