



STAR WARS

## THE DREADFUL CHIMAERA

By VA Hawkins

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The bridge of the ISDII Hammer bristled with tension.

Blue and red icons moved across a simulated space before High Admiral Dempsey's eyes, mapping out the manoeuvres of hundreds of ships. Icons representing secondary and tertiary squadrons swarmed across the screen, whilst the primary squadrons of the TIE Corps showed up in a more brilliant hue, weaving with practiced ease amongst the lower-grade craft. Amongst the swirling move of squadrons swam three larger vessels, and a further ship of colossal size. Not since the Sovereign was in active service had Dempsey stood before such a powerful ship – the ISDN Chimaera, Fleet Admiral Pellaeon's self-declared flagship of the TIE Corps. Dempsey briefly wondered how Plif had taken that move, before dismissing it as irrelevant, for the moment. The Hammer and her sister ship, the Warrior sat side by side, facing the Chimaera and the ISDII Challenge, each manoeuvring towards each other – each taking up an attack posture.

"High Admiral," Dempsey's Communications officer called, "We are receiving requests that we declare our allegiance from both the Challenge and the Chimaera." Dempsey nodded. Just as expected. Without a word, she strode to the comms station and hit the button that would connect her to the Warrior.

"Admiral Plif," she said, her voice hard and purposeful, "Are we at full readiness?" The reply came quick, but heavily laced with static. The electronic countermeasures being put out by the Chimaera were proving difficult to block, and even at this proximity made communications difficult.

"We are," Plif replied in person – a clear indication of the gravity of the situation. Delegation was the usual prerogative of an admiral, but this was far from the time or place for such decadence.

"Both Sigma and Sin are deployed," Plif continued, "and have enough heavy rockets and bombs to reduce a whole planet to ashes. Let us hope that it either won't come to that, or that a whole planet will be enough..." The signal cut.

It had been agreed that as the higher ranking admiral, Dempsey would make the contact with the competing admirals. She turned from the bridge and made for her private communications chamber. This would prove a most interesting meeting.

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COL Wraith of Sin squadron was on the verge of delicately removing his radar screens, and hurling them through the view-shield of his missileboat, out into space. His tactical display was a confusing mass of icons. Hundreds of fighters, transports, shuttles and other craft spun through space amking tracking anything all but impossible. If this turned ugly, it would be 'nearest enemy' only until some of the heard was thinned. For the fourth time, he requested a squadron status check. Each pilot responded promptly, each indicating their readiness. The tension in each voice was marked. Dozens of squadrons, both front line and secondary, were in a desperate, silent battle for position. Not a shot had been fired, neither side willing to commit themselves to one side or the other. If the forces of the Challenge of the Chimaera attacked those of the Warrior or Hammer, then that would essentially decide for them whose side to choose, and Wraith assumed both sides still hoped that the forces of the TIE Corps would side with them.

Wraith throttled up his own ship, the other three fighters in his wing matching his speed as he moved for an inspection pass on the Chimaera. He guessed such a move would be both expected and unopposed. Pellaeon's message had been presented to them all, and he guessed the Fleet Admiral would expect them to attempt to confirm some of the details of the ship.

As his flight banked towards the enormous vessel, two squadrons of the newer mark of Interceptor moved to take flanking positions. A quick scan registered them as from the Chimaera. So, not entirely unopposed. The Mk. III Interceptors, their flight wings swept outwards instead of inwards, quickly closed and bracketed the missileboats on either side. The threat was obvious, but no shots were fired. Wraith would not be put off, and switched his scanners to the huge ship before him.

Nothing. Scans came back all but blank. They registered the presence of the vessel, but could not penetrate the electronic interference it projected. Wraith grimaced in frustration.

"Sin 1 to squadron, can anyone get a decent reading?" He asked. Static was his only reply. For a moment, he thought there was a voice on the edge of his hearing, but it was drowned in a sea of electronic distortion. Nothing for it but to deploy MK.I Eyeball. Rolling the ship over, he flew a close pass of the hull of the Star Dreadnought. He watched as innumerable turrets turned to track him, both laser and warhead. Curious emitter arrays bristled from the heavily armoured surface, and point defence and flak screen weapons. Those would make getting clear warhead hits very difficult. They would need point blank deployment, which would put his squadron in the blast radius.

As he skirted towards the nose of the ship, he saw the Challenge hanging in space. It seemed so small in comparison to the behemoth now falling behind him. He headed towards it, marvelling at the defiance of Admiral Elwood. Perhaps Pellaeon had a point. No admiral worth his salt would imagine a single Star Destoryer could take on the beast that was the Chimaera. If Elwood thought he could bow Pellaeon with just one ship, maybe he had failed the Corps. Or did he imagine that the Corps would unwaveringly fall into line behind him, and the combined might of the Corps would prevail? Even so, against such a vessel the fight would be hard fought and by no means a forgone conclusion. If they followed Elwood, would the remains of the Corp be worth fighting for? And was that the very idea Pellaeon was relying on?

He banked his ship back towards the Warrior, his squadron following. The trailing Interceptors were quickly left behind and they peeled off to track one of the Hammer's tertiary bomber groups. He used his rear view screens to look at the two opposing vessels, and thanked the stars that it wasn't him that would make the call as to which they would fall behind.

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“And I insist to assist the Challenge in the capture or destruction of this Chimaera!” Elwood growled. In the space of less than a few minutes, the holographic representations of both Pellaeon and Elwood had welcomed, praised, persuaded and threatened Admiral Dempsey. The two holograms stood glowering at each other. Had they not been holograms, Dempsey imagined they could have drawn lightsabres and duelled it out here and now. Which, she thought, may have been preferable.

“Admirals, Admirals,” Dempsey insisted, “You both make a very compelling argument. Admiral Plif and I have both reviewed your requests, or rather demands, for our loyalty. Elwood, you stand as TCCOM. Pellaeon, you state regulations flawlessly and have followed them. You do understand the position you put us in?” She asked.

“The only position you are in is one in which you are required to obey the orders of your commanding officer!” Elwood stated, with a finality in his tone he must have hoped would close the matter.

“Agreed,” replied Pellaeon. “And AS your commanding officer, I demand that you bring this traitor into custody aboard the Chimaera.” His hologram pointed furiously towards Elwood.

“I am afraid I disagree.” Dempsey said. The furious, surprised stares of the other two admirals would amuse Dempsey for a long time, assuming all went to plan. Both suddenly erupted in angry voices, each decrying her disobedience and foolishness for allowing herself to be swayed by the traitorous other admiral.

“Admirals!” She shouted over the ranting, “I disagree because *neither* of you stand as my commanding officer.”

That shook them. The confusion on their faces gave Dempsey a sly smile.

“I am here to inform you that you are *both* relieved of command.” The other admirals began to protest, but she shouted them down, her anger and frustration enough to give both Pellaeon and Elwood pause.

“I do not know which of you is the hero, and which the traitor, but I will not permit the TIE Corps to batter itself to death against the hulls of *either* of your vessels. Pellaeon, if we side with Elwood we will grind your ship into space dust, and lose most of our fleet in the process. Elwood, if we side with Pellaeon we open ourselves to endless an coup-d’etat, as every officer of ambition seeks to oust the one above with pronouncements of failure. I will not lead the Emperor’s Hammer down that road either. You will both *stand down*. Admiral Plif will take command of the Chimaera, which will escort the Challenge back to the Aroua system. You will both be presented to the Grand admiral, or whoever we can find to sort this mess out between the two of you. And *IF* either of you are so lucky as to be vindicated, I am sure you will be provided with a very generous *retirement* plan.”

The chamber rang with the echo of her voice, seeming to go on far longer than could be natural. Dempsey stood and breathed slowly, awaiting their reaction. Both stood staring at her, a mixture of frustration and respect etched across their faces. She reached out with her supernatural senses, attempting to detect which way the coin would fall, and felt it spinning uncertainly. She felt the threads of fate pulled in different directions, sensing the many futures stretching away from this moment. She stood before the holographic admirals an exuded defiance, daring either of them to take her on.

“And if I refuse?” It was Elwood who spoke. She turned to him, slowly.

“Then you will both be destroyed, and we can all dance in the fire as the Corps we have all sworn allegiance to burn before our eyes.”

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