

STAR THE DREADFUL CHIMAERA WARS

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BY VA HAWKINS

“What a chimaera then is man, what a novelty, what a monster, what chaos, what a subject of contradiction, what a prodigy!”

Blaise Pascal

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MAJ Silvius desperately tracked multiple targets simultaneously. Moments ago, the fighters from both the ISDII Challenge and the Star Dreadnought Chimaera stopped their defensive patrols and took up positions ready to attack, both each other and the Warrior and Challenge. Still, not shots had been fired, but now squadrons weaved back and forth in a wild attempt to be in the superior position when the final order came.

Silvius gave sharp, precise orders to his squadron, the Spectre missile boats securing multiple target locks, tracking both the larger vessels and many of their defence squadrons. Whenever the first shots came, the opening salvo from Alpha squadron would tear a hole through the 'enemy' fleet. Silvius forced himself to think of them as the enemy. It would be impossible to do his duty if he thought of them as what they were – loyal pilots of the TIE Corps. That he may soon be forced to kill them was a difficult burden to bear, and he cursed whatever path had led them to this situation.

“Alpha 1 to Alpha, stand by for my signal. When it comes, I want no hesitation. Hit them with everything you have, and back to the Hammer to rearm. I don't want Task given any more reason than he needs to berate us!” He listened with satisfaction to the responses of the squad; some joined in the banter, taking advantage of a brief moment of levity, others replied with deep concentration in their voice. He knew Alpha would do him proud today. He just hoped they would do the Corps proud, however that may come about.

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Dempsey and the two holographic Fleet Admirals stood, measuring each other's resolve. The air was thick with tension, and Dempsey wondered if any of them would ultimately stand down, or whether today would be the day the TIE Corps imploded.

“Admirals,” She began, “You both know...” She didn't get the chance to finish. An alarm, played in triplicate over the sound systems of each ship and relayed via the holographic connections, echoed into the room. Each admiral turned and demanded reports from their comms devices. Amongst the chaos of chatter, Dempsey focused on her own systems.

“Admiral! Republic fleet dropping out of light speed! Multiple capital class ships – we read at least 6 Calamari Cruisers, and one Star Defender – the 'Hope of Endor'. Multiple Alphabet fighters already inbound. Sir, they are broadcasting a message now.”

“Play it,” Dempsey ordered. A click signalled the change in channels, and a static laden voice came over her systems.

“Fleet of the Emperor's Hammer,” It began, “You are hereby ordered, by the authority of the high council of the Republic, to stand down all forces and surrender. Your actions in the capture of Republic personnel and the aggressive deployment of your fleet has been deemed in contravention of all non-aggression pacts between us. I repeat, stand down and surrender your vessels, prepare to be boarded, and return to us all and any captured republic personnel. Failure to do so will be held as an act of war against the Republic. You have one minute to comply.”

Dempsey looked to Elwood and Pellaeon, who were staring at each other.

“Well, Woody,” Pellaeon began, “Trust the republic to crash a perfectly good evaluation exercise.”

Dempsey stared at Pellaeon in disbelief.

“Quite,” Woody replied, full of frustration. His holgram made a signal to someone out of view of the projector, and a third hologram appeared in Dempsey's chamber. At the sight of the new arrival, Dempsey dropped to her knees.

Grand Admiral Rapiet stood tall in the room, his presence potent despite the translucence of it.

“To the Admirals and officers of the TIE Corps. Operation Dreadful Chimaera is now ended. Admirals Elwood and Pellaeon will stand down all forces from this exercise and resume the usual chain of command, and deal with this impertinent Rebel fleet. Send those Rebels to hell.” And with that, the link cut.

Elwood and Pellaeon looked to the astonished Dempsey. And smiled.

Dempsey stood, furious.

“This was a *training exercise*?” she growled.

“Of course,” Elwood said, a look of utter bemusement that she could have possibly considered it anything other than that etched across his face. “Now,” he continued, “If you don't mind, we have some rather pressing business to attend to. Form in on the Chimaera, High Admiral. It will lead the charge!”

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The space surrounding the Chimaera was a chaotic, spinning scrap yard. Glowing, sparking wreckage drifted through space amongst frozen clouds of escaped atmosphere. Twisted shapes recognisable as the pilots and crew of both large and small craft bumped and spun away amongst the wreckage. Weaving amongst it all were the fighters of both fleets, punching streams of energy out across space towards each other.

Plif watched his tactical display with growing concern. The Republic fleet heavily outnumbered them, and despite the advantage in quality of fighters, the sheer numbers opposing them were slowly turning the battle in the favour of the enemy.

"What is the status of the fleet?" He asked, steadying himself as another salvo of warheads got through the failing shields of the Warrior and shook the hull.

"Admiral," His tactical officer replied, somewhat groggily. He was bleeding from a deep wound on his forehead, earned when the station next to his exploded in a burst of feedback after a particularly effective bombing run by Republic fighters. His fortitude in remaining at his post impressed Plif.

"Admiral," the officer continued, "the Chimaera is heavily damaged. The combined fire of the Star Defender and two Cruisers is wearing her down. She has shielded the Challenge and ourselves well so far, but unless we can even the odds I'm not sure she can last much longer." Plif cursed the Republic. This was a far bolder move than he had given them any credit for, and the Emperor's Hammer was in danger of paying a high price to escape it. Plif moved across the bridge and looked out the main windows of the bridge. He could see the Chimaera burning. Even in space, the potent energies flowing through her, mixed with escaping atmosphere, were producing brilliant trails of fire. Looking down the length of the Warrior, he saw his ship was faring little better. Despite the valiant efforts of Sin and Sigma, the sheer number of Rebel fighters meant they could not stop every missile, and how the Sigma pilots were turning the Scimitar bombers into effective dogfighters was nothing short of miraculous.

A brilliant flare of light drew his gaze back to the Chimaera. A secondary generator must have been hit, and a vast shock wave was racing away from the vessel.

Plif turned to his comms officer.

"Get onto Pellaeon, tell him we will cover his retreat." Even as he said it, he knew Pellaeon would never retreat.

"Negative, Admiral. We have an incoming message, he is ordering the fleet back." The comms officer replied.

"Back?" Plif asked. "What is he thinking of doing..." He began, but stopped as he saw the engines flare and the Chimaera move forwards.

"He's going to ram that Star Defender..." Plif whispered.

He watched in seemingly slow motion as the ship moved onwards. The gap between the vessels was huge, and it would be several minutes before the Chimaera reached the Hope of Endor, not that such a huge ship could move fast enough to avoid the collision. He looked for any alternative, and change of plan that could turn the tide, and found none.

Suddenly, a flash of movement. Another vessel dropped out of hyperspace above the Chimaera, and poured its own fire into the battle. It was the Aggressor, the Victory class Star Destroyer of Admiral Hawkins. Plif rushed to the tactical display, and watched as Kappa and Theta deployed into space. The Aggressor was dwarfed by the colossal Chimaera, but came fully armed and ready for battle. Plif stared, trying to see the sense in the move. A victory class Star Destroyer was a powerful vessel, but would be well matched by a single Calamari Cruiser. What could it do against a Star Defender and two Cruisers? Then he saw it. The smaller vessel wasn't shielding the dreadnought, but the two squadrons she had deployed. Theta's Landing craft were making for the bridge of the Chimaera, escorted by the other two flights and all of Kappa. Plif watched as they cut a path through the swirling melee of fighters, weaving between wreckage and enemy craft with practised efficiency.

Plif turned to the comms station.

“Admiral Plif to Wing II. Clear a path for Theta to the Chimaera, then escort Admiral Pellaeon back to the Warrior.”

There may be some hope yet.

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Admiral Pellaeon sat in the landing craft, watching the death-throws of the battle. Wing I had successfully disabled the two cruisers that had so badly hammered his Chimaera, and their close proximity to the Star Defender would seal their fates. He watched as the engines of the Star Dreadnought glowed brightly, pushing the vessel unfailingly towards the Rebel vessel that was easily her match. But the Rebels lacked the will to do what was truly necessary for victory. Pellaeon knew all were expendable, even himself, in the pursuit of victory. He was, however, glad that on this day, he would not need to spend his own life. The ship, set onto auto-guidance, would sell itself dearly amongst the Rebel fleet. Green laser blasts still poured from her still functioning turrets, crippling or destroying the corvettes and frigates that swarmed to protect the largest Rebel ship. Pellaeon smiled at the futility of it.

A sudden, blinding flare signalled the arrival of the Chimaera at her destination. The pointed prow of the ship drove into the flanks of the Hope of Endor, causing massive structural collapse in both vessels. Explosions rippled through both vessels, before the main reactors of the Star Defender overloaded and detonated in a burst of unimaginable energy. The blast wave tore what was left of both vessels apart, wreckage carried away by the immense shock-wave. He braced for the impact of it, watching as those vessels still close to the impact were caught in the blast and erupted themselves. A whole squadron of corvette was devastated in a single moment, and several frigates rolled away, crippled or destroyed. The heart of the Republic fleet had been destroyed. Already he could see the other vessels of the Rebels beginning to turn and retreat. He desperately wished to give pursuit, but knew that was unwise. The TIE Corps had taken a battering, and victory today had come at a heavy price, one the Republic had not been willing to pay.

“And that,” he mused, “is why we shall always win.”

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Elwood and Pellaeon sat aboard the Challenge, relaxing in the officer's mess. The mood around them was jubilant. Despite the loss of the Chimaera, the defeat of such a powerful fleet would send a clear message to the Republic, and ensure the security of Emperor's Hammer space for at least a year.

As they watched their subordinates enjoy the highs of victory, Elwood turned to Pellaeon.

“Here's to a hard won victory” he said, and raised his glass. Pellaeon returned the gesture with a smile.

“A pity about the Chimaera,” he continued. “I know it was a project close to your heart. If only we had built two!” Elwood mused.

Pellaeon simply smiled, and turned to look out of the window, a knowing expression on his face.

“If only...” he said, and smiled to himself.