



STAR WARS

THE DREADFUL CHIMAERA

By VA Hawkins

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High Admiral Dempsey carefully scrutinised the faces of the officers around her. Each one had proven themselves again and again in service to the TIE Corps, the fleet of the Emperor's Hammer, and, most importantly in the eyes of the admiral, to the ISDII Hammer. They each met her gaze in turn.

"Am I to understand we are no nearer to identifying our saboteur?" She asked, a steely tone to her voice. Major Task seemed to be the appointed spokesperson for the command staff of the Hammer, and he rose to speak.

"Admiral," He began, his usually gruff voice tinged with what may have been frustration. "We have conducted extensive searches of all compartments, interviewed all members of the crew, your-self excluded of course, and have been able to find no evidence of a saboteur on board."

"So, you have failed, then?" Dempsey snapped back.

"Admiral, if I may," he replied, "I do not believe so. Whilst the explosion could not have been caused by a malfunction, and is certainly an act of sabotage, I believe it highly unlikely that the saboteur is a member of this crew. Whilst I may berate my pilots for their failings in the cockpit – as is my duty as Wing Commander – I have the utmost faith in their loyalty. I have been assured by our other officers that they hold their own departments in the same esteem. Admiral, the crew of the Hammer is unflinchingly loyal to you and the Emperor's Hammer. I cannot, therefore, conclude that the saboteur is one of our own."

Dempsey sat back in her chair, and allowed her expression to soften. She had reached the same conclusion hours before. She knew each and every member of her crew – if not personally then through the rigorous reporting and monitoring systems that made up the bureaucracy of running such a colossal vessel and the Hammer. For all its drudgery, the Empire had been ruthlessly efficient, and the Emperor's Hammer had inherited that trait.

"You may relax, Major. I concur with your assessment." Task, and the other officers, were visibly relieved.

"Which begs the question – if not us, who?"

“A member of the inspection crew back on Aurora?” suggested Tactical Officer Buren. “If the device wasn’t put in place by one of our crew, that would be the next most likely source.”

Dempsey nodded, and turned to Comms Officer Nadaina, who was sitting on the far side of the briefing desk, nearest the door.

“Send a communique back to the Fleet Headquarters and order a review of all personnel on inspection duty during the Hammer’s last visit. I want to know as soon as...” Dempsey stopped as the door to the chamber opened, and a junior officer stode in quickly, offering only a hurried salute to the Admiral before rushing over the the Comms officer. The junior officer handed Nadaina a data-pad, and stood waiting for him to review the contents. Dempsey held her rising frustration in check. Interrupting a command briefing was highly irregular, and she would have to speak to Comms Officer Nadaina about maintaining better discipline amongst his subordinates. She gave Nadaina a hard stare, but was surprised to see the colour drain from his face.

“Commander Nadaina, would you care to explain this interruption?” Dempsey asked, curtly.

“Urgent communication, High Admiral. If you would allow me a moment...” He tapped hurriedly at the data-pad. After a few moments, he stood and proceeded around the table to hand it to the admiral.

Dempsey studied it carefully, her interest piqued first by the interruption, and Nadaina’s reaction to it.

To all Officers and crews of the Emperor’s Hammer TIE Corps, and all other associated units and organisations, from Fleet Admiral Elwood.

With immediate effect, SOO FA Pellaeon is to be considered a deserter and traitor to the TIE Corps. He has abandoned his post without authorisation, and stolen Emperor’s Hammer property.

All forces of the TIE Corps are ordered to hunt down this traitor, and if possible, capture and return him to the ISDII Challenge for court-martial.

TCCOM/FA Elwood The Brave/TC-1/ISDII Challenge.

“Is this some form of joke, Commander?” Dempsey asked, anger mixed with disbelief.

“No Sir, the communication is authenticated, sent maximum priority. It is real.”

“Get me Fleet Admiral Elwood, now!” She demanded, and for the second time in as many moments found herself surprised at Nadaina. Rather than rush to address her orders, he extended a second datapad towards her.

“As is this second communication...” He trailed off, as Dempsey took the second pad.

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Admiral Plif stared at the second communication as it hovered before him, projected into the briefing room by a pair of floating holo-spheres. The assembled ISDII Warrior bridge crew each bore the same expression of disbelief. As if in an effort to find some flaw, some mistake, Plif read the message aloud.

“To all Officers and crews of the Emperor’s Hammer TIE Corps, and all other associated units and organisations, from Fleet Admiral Pellaeon.

It is my regretful duty to inform you that Fleet Admiral Elwood, known as ‘the Brave’, has failed in his duty to the Emperor’s Hammer, and as such, should be considered relieved of his command, in line with my duty as SOO and under section 37b of the Officer’s Code.

By failing to secure significant additional territories, or secure any significant technological advancements, he has left the Emperor's Hammer vulnerable to outside aggressors. Furthermore, I include in this communique a number of documents that demonstrate a significant lack of judgement; notably, the lapses in security that have allowed a saboteur to strike against the ISDII Hammer, and an unknown adversary to attack and severely damage the ISDII Warrior with technologies beyond that currently available within the TIE Corps.

This is evidence of a TIE Corps Commander who has failed in their duties.

It is therefore my sad duty to assume Command of the fleet assets of the TIE Corps, to bring former Fleet Admiral Elwood to justice, and ensure the security of the Emperor's Hammer by all available means.

To that end, my first act has been to secure advanced technologies for the defence of the Emperor's Hammer. Through intelligence gathered through my personal interrogation of a significant Republic General, I have been able to successfully capture and bring into the service of the TIE Corps a new class of Star Dreadnought known as a Chimaera class, and now to be known as the "ISDN-I Chimaera", in full service of the TIE Corps.

To prove my sincerity, full details of this new ship are attached for your review.

Those found to be aiding and abetting former Fleet Admiral Elwood will be declared traitors to the Emperor's Hammer and the TIE Corps, and dealt with appropriately. I call on all loyal officers of the Emperor's Hammer to respond immediately, and are hereby ordered to seek and secure the traitor Elwood at the earliest opportunity. Any officers serving aboard the Challenge are ordered to detain Elwood immediately, and return him for interrogation and trail to the Aurora system.

For the Emperor and the Emperor's Hammer!"

The message was signed 'TCCOM-SOO-LOA/FA Pellaeon/TC-1/ISDN-I Chimaera'.

"This is... incredible..." General Frown murmured. Plif understood the sentiment. This was beyond credibility – two messages, both declaring a member of the admiralty board a traitor to the Corps.

"Both messages come with all appropriate authentication codes, and conform with proper protocols." The comms officer declared. "We must consider them as genuine, if contradictory."

Plif lent forwards, resting his arched fingers against his lips, deep in thought.

"Could this be part of a test?" He asked the assembled officers. Frown caught his eye, and repeated a phrase he had used following their last engagement.

"The deviousness of our admirals knows no bounds..."

"What if this is not a test?" the tactical officer asked. "Can we afford to consider it as such if there truly is strife amongst the fleet?"

"We need more intelligence before we can act," Plif decided. "Get me Hawkins, first. He may have information that will help us chart the correct course. We cannot directly contact either Elwood or Pellaeon, we may be aiding an enemy of the Corps. Next, get me Dempsey and the Hammer. We must know their intentions."

The officers stood, and went to their duties. Only Frown remained behind.

"And if this is not a test?" he asked the admiral.

Plif did not answer.