



STAR WARS

THE DREADFUL CHIMAERA

By VA Hawkins

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The blackness of the whispering temple seemed to deepen rather than recede as the holographic image of a robed and hooded figure appeared before him. The depths of his own robes ensured his face remained in shadow before the glowing image. The silence seemed to deepen, as if the whole chamber awaited the words of these clandestine figures, seemingly aware of the power these two figures wielded. Few in the galaxy could boast such power, which stood at odds with the secretive nature of the meeting.

“It has begun.” The hologram intoned.

“Excellent,” the chamber echoed with the physical figure’s voice, the silent whispered voices taking up his words and carrying them around the chamber, going on long after any law of sound should allow.

“Confusion. Uncertainty. They will spread like wild-fire.”

“We risk being burned by it, we must tread carefully.”

“We will be burnt – I have no doubt. But we shall be tempered by it, as steel in a furnace.”

“Your vision is inspired, old friend. The weak shall be purified in the fire, and the strong made stronger. As is our way.”

“Indeed it is. Now, go. We have much to achieve.”

The hologram faded, and vanished. The voiceless whispers echoed the conversation, before slowly fading into utter silence. The dark figure remained, alone. It stood in contemplation of the future, allowing the focused energies within the chamber to guide

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Admiral Plif sat opposite the projected image of High Admiral Dempsey. There was a palpable tension in the room, despite the reality of the distance between them. Both Admirals had their own ambitions, and their rivalry was far from secret, even if amicable. However, both now watched the other suspiciously, both realising the gravity of the situation they faced, and neither wanting to paint themselves a traitor in such a time of confusion and uncertainty.

"I tell you, High Admiral, there is no question of Pellaeon's loyalty being anything other than absolute." Plif insisted, the difficulty of the negotiations removing any trace of informality between the two officers. Each held control over a powerful battle fleet, each headed by an Imperial Star Destroyer.

"And I remind you, *Admiral* Plif," Dempsey replied, the intonation in her voice making the difference in rank patently clear, "That Fleet Admiral Elwood is the TIE Corps Commander, and the ultimate authority in the fleet. Only the Grand Admiral himself could remove him, not the SOO."

"Yes, but you know as well as I the extent to which our communications have been compromised. All transmissions to our core systems are being blocked, we assume by either Elwood or Pellaeon. I've tried reaching Hawkins and the Aggressor task force, but have so far been unsuccessful. Unless you have some means of communications I do not, we are working in the dark."

Dempsey's frustrated silence answered that question. It seemed clear to Plif that Dempsey was experiencing the same difficulties with gathering any useful intelligence. He felt her holographic eyes study him closely. His image would be as translucent and vague as hers was to him, yet he could feel the intense scrutiny. It took a moment for Plif to realise exactly what was happening. Dempsey was trying to decide if he was a traitor or not. Plif would have scowled had the exact same thought crossed his own mind about her. But here, now, could they afford the mistrust?

"Dempsey," Plif eventually continued, "This is a mess. I'm two squadrons down with a ship that is being held together mostly by Frown shouting at people. I am in no position to play games with you, and certainly not with the security of the Emperor's Hammer. So stop looking at me like I might pull some holographic wonder-blaster and shoot you, and let's put an end to this before someone else does."

Plif waited. Dempsey's gaze seemed to grown only more intense, and Plif felt the pressure in his temples. He wondered if it was the stress of the situation, or something more. Dempsey was trained in the ways of the Sith, the lightsabre she wore as part of her uniform stood a testament to that, mirroring his own. He let that power seep from him, surrounding him with its aura. For a moment, he suspected he felt the gossamer touching of minds, but it was so fleeting he could not be sure. However, a moment later, Dempsey sat up a little straighter, and nodded.

"As a matter of fact, I do. Of a kind, anyway," Dempsey began. "Delta has been out since we got the messages. We do not know the disposition of the core worlds, or the location of Hawkins, but the Challenge and this 'Chimaera' have both been located." Plif let out a slow breath. He hadn't been sure that Dempsey had trusted him, but such a tactical revelation was promising.

"The Chimaera? What can you tell me about it?"

"Delta report it as a formidable vessel. They have no close range scans or even images, but the gravity well it has is colossally powerful. They were forced to drop form hyperspace two whole parsecs early, else they may not have been able to return. That matches the data in the files Pellaeon sent in his 'good will' message."

"And the Challenge?" Plif asked,

"On an intercept course. Delta picked up a fairly scrambled message requesting all forces converge on her location to assist in the capture of Pellaeon. They had to get pretty close to get anything. Communication anywhere near the Chimaera is all but impossible. As the Challenge gets closer, that will only worsen. Our relative proximity is all that allows this communication. If we go after either of the Admirals, we'll be running on silent till what ever happens is over."

"Then we don't have much time to decide what to do, and get it done. The question remains, what is the correct action to take?"

Dempsey looked genuinely surprised.

“Why, Admiral Plif. I should have thought *that* was obvious.”

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The two Imperial Star Destroyers dropped light speed, forced back into using their standard engines by a powerful gravity well, presumably from the new vessel Fleet Admiral Pellaeon claimed he had secured for the Emperor’s Hammer. Any element of surprise the vessels had hoped for was gone. Smaller vessels of varying types deployed from the larger ships – point defence reserve fighters darting out to pre-planned positions, whilst the more advanced craft of the front-line squadrons deployed in varying capacities. The Tie Phantoms of Delta quickly faded from view as they spread out to achieve various reconnaissance objectives, whilst TIE Advanced, TIE Defenders and missile boats deployed in preparation for any unexpected attack from anything the second tier squadrons couldn’t handle.

Admiral Plif reviewed the deployment, as it was displayed on the tactical hologram that hovered above the tactical station on the bridge of the Warrior. It would have to be a formidable opponent to resist the deployment of two ISDIIs, as well as the range of advanced fighters at their disposal. However, he wasn’t blind to the fact he was two squadrons down and in a ship that was decidedly below full capacity. It galled Plif that the Warrior would be relying on the Hammer to act as the centre point of the combined fleet. The Warrior remained the flagship of the fleet, and not taking pride of place on this deployment was frustrating. However, it was also tactically astute, so Plif swallowed his pride and readied himself for action.

“Hammer reports all squadrons deployed, and requests that we close on the Chimaera.” Plif hid any annoyance at Dempsey’s presumption. He may have the higher rank, but Plif was still at the helm of the flagship. The Empire had fostered rivalries, encouraged them even. Ambition drove officers towards excellence. However, that hubris had led to the collapse of the Empire as it had been. He would not allow the old ways to colour his duties.

“Inform Dempsey that the Warrior will lead the way. Remind him that the only way is through!” he stated.

In the silence of space, engines blazed like miniature suns, powering the two colossal vessels towards their destinations.

Aboard the Hammer, Dempsey watched through the main windows of the bridge as the Warrior pulled ahead, her functioning engines glowing fiercely. She briefly attempted to estimate how far beyond safety limits Plif was pushing her in to allow the Warrior’s damaged engine blocks to still pull ahead of the fully functioning Hammer. She toyed with the idea of ordering her own engine room to do the same, but decided against it. There was enough rivalry within the Corps at the moment. Perhaps too much. Was that what this situation was? The rivalries amongst the admiralty board finally getting the better of them? That smacked too much of the old Empire, and not the glory of the Emperor’s Hammer. Doubt nagged at her. She was a Sith, and knew that order well. Ambition; power – these were the hall marks of her order. The powerful subjugated the weak. Had Pellaeon taken that road? And was he justified in doing so? This vessel he now commanded was power personified, and far outmatched the Challenge. Was he therefore right to demand his accession to the position of TCCOM? Dempsey glanced over at the tactical display, one which mirrored the one aboard her sister, the Warrior.

It would not be long before she found out.

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