



STAR WARS

THE DREADFUL CHIMAERA

By VA Hawkins

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Admiral Pellaeon strode purposefully down the corridors towards the hanger decks. One of the supreme advantages of his position was an ability to pass unchallenged throughout the ship. Even the request of a shuttle for an otherwise unscheduled launch would pass without question. The confidence with which Pellaeon moved was bolstered by the knowledge that even if any of the naval troopers and other security personnel attempted to prevent his progress, his ability at wielding the dark side of the force would ensure their efforts were futile.

Arriving at the hangar deck, he quickly sought out the deck officer. Pellaeon simply stood before the bemused officer with an expression of expectancy and frustration at a perceived 'delay', sending the officer scurrying away to organise a transport for the admiral. A pulse of force suggestion from Pellaeon had ensured that the deck officer ignored the usual protocol for checking dispatch confirmations. It wouldn't do to give the game away too early. He needed to ensure his departure from the Challenge would remain unnoticed for as long as possible. That would ensure the greatest chance of success. Once his absence had been noticed, he would have a limited window of opportunity to put his plan into action. He wanted to be sure that window was as large as possible.

In an impressively short time, a shuttle was readied for the Admiral, complete with a hastily assembled honour guard. For all the force-suggestion, Pellaeon was never-the-less impressed by the initiative of the deck officer. Had circumstances been different, he may have marked the man for promotion. However, now was not the time for such matters. He walked up the embarkation ramp and dismissed the waiting pilots with a gesture and the implanted suggestion that asking questions would lead to grave consequences. As he prepped the shuttle for launch, he briefly wondered what the consequences would be for the deck officer and pilots would be – how Admiral Elwood would deal with them once he had been informed by his crew that Pellaeon had gone, taking a shuttle with him. As the shuttle lifted off the deck, Pellaeon put those thoughts behind him and pulled away into space, being careful to remain on the ventral side of the bulky star destroyer, ensuring as few personnel as possible would note his passage and the chance that any of them would request confirmation of departure orders. He would not give them much time to do so. The datacard that he had slipped into the navigational systems of the shuttle had already transferred the

relevant hyperspace calculations, and within mere seconds of exiting the ship, the shuttle accelerated away, a distant, silent flash as the ship broke the light-barrier offering a brief farewell to his now former vessel.

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Fleet Admiral Elwood sat reclined in his chair, a small holographic representation of Vice Admiral Hawkins projected onto the tabletop before him. Hawkins stood surprisingly defiantly so someone whose holo-form stood little more than a few inches tall.

“No, Hawkins,” Elwood insisted, “I want the complete data for the whole sector. Every victory, every loss, every laser fired, every warhead launched.”

“Admiral Elwood, I am quite...” Hawkins began, but Elwood interrupted.

“I have made my decision, *Vice-Admiral*. See that I am not disappointed.” With that, Elwood cut the link. He remained in his reclined position, smiling quietly to himself. Hawkins was a fine Admiral, who had a way with the crews who served in active combat duties that was enviable. It was rather satisfying to remind him who, ultimately, was the TCCOM. That brought a rye chuckle to Elwood’s lips. Hawkins won his fair share of battles over procedural arrangements. He fought his corners well, and showed all proper decorum when things did not go his way. He would watch with interest where Hawkins’ next steps within the Corps would be. Elwood knew that Hawkins’ second aboard the Aggressor, *Silvius*, was itching to step into the Vice-Admiral’s shoes. If Hawkins was not careful, those steps might be out of an airlock. Ambition was a potent motive, he mused.

Returning his focus to the operations currently underway, he thumbed the comms button on the console attached to the side of his chair.

“Elwood to Pellaeon,” he called, and waited for Pellaeon’s usual timely reply. It took him somewhat by surprise when the SOO did not immediately reply.

“Admiral Elwood to Admiral Pellaeon, please respond.” He waited once again. This was highly irregular, and it tugged at Elwood’s patience.

“Bridge, locate Admiral Pellaeon and *politely* inform him that he is requested in my office,” Elwood ordered. He awaited confirmation, just be sure there was not a comms failure. The prompt reply from the duty officer showed that there was no such fault. What on Coruscant was Pellaeon playing at?

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Elwood could tell this was not going to be good news. Half of the command officers of the *Challenge* were stood in his office, all looking decidedly sheepish. It had been only fifteen minutes since he’d requested they locate Admiral Pellaeon for him. He suspected that the last 7 had likely been spent attempting to decide who would be the one to break whatever the predicted ‘bad news’ was going to be.

“Well?” the Fleet Admiral asked the assembled officers.

“Fleet Admiral...” The Duty officer began, hesitantly. He swallowed hard, and continued, “Fleet Admiral, Admiral Pellaeon is no longer aboard the *Challenge*.” Elwood stared at the man, hard. He could see the officer squirm under the intense scrutiny.

“Then where is he?” Elwood asked, each word spat out like a hammer blow.

“Admiral Pellaeon commandeered a shuttle from the launch bay, and left without prior notice, or other authorisation. We have attempted to contact the Admiral, but he has so far not responded to any of our efforts.” Elwood looked around the room, noting each officer as they averted their gaze and found

something intensely interesting on the bulkhead somewhere beyond his head. His hand shaking, Elwood carefully placed the data-slate he had been holding on the desk before him. It rattled as it hit the hard surface.

“Officers of the watch, the deck officer and duty officer please remain. Everybody else, you are dismissed.”

The three officers stood firmly to attention, whilst the rest of the room quickly cleared.

Those who had been fortunate enough to be dismissed sighed audibly as they left the Admiral's office. The door had barely closed behind them when they heard the raised voice of Fleet Admiral Elwood delicately suggesting to the officers that they had not, perhaps, met his usual expected standards.

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So, thought Admiral Elwood, Pell's finally gone and done it...

He was alone once again, the room dark around him. He had switched off all lighting, and let the darkness surround him. His super-natural, force driven senses probed the strings of possibility, seeking hints as to what was to come. He had, of course, expected such a move. Pell's timing was exceptional. The Warrior was half crippled, the Hammer dealing with a suspected saboteur, and a number of front line squadrons re-deployed on training manoeuvres or recovering aboard the Aggressor following their latest assignments in capturing the Republic general who was still recovering from his extensive interrogation at the hands of the now absent Admiral Pellaeon. What better time than this? The Corps was as vulnerable as they ever got. He could not fault Pell's tactics, and mentally reproached himself for not seeing it coming.

He now had his own moves to plan. This was not entirely unanticipated – he would have been foolish not to have planned for the possibility. But as things stood, much would change. And he had no doubt he would have little time to implement any such changes.

He smiled. Finally. A test truly worthy.