

THE LYCURGOS STAR FORT

In the waning days of the Angevin Crusade, there were, at times, more Imperial assets available than ideal systems for continued expansion. On some occasions, the fleet was badly dispersed and some groups became uncertain about the prioritisation of remaining targets. The repeated successes enjoyed by St. Drusus and communications breakdowns led to situations where fleets arrived in systems that had already been conquered. At other times, poor strategic estimates sent entire armies to worlds that were later deprioritised.

Some of the advance craft remained dutifully in these systems until they met with disaster, or were lost due to insufficient supplies as they waited patiently for contact from the fleet. Others returned to their launch site, where they were executed for treason for daring to abandon their assigned posts. The *Lycurgos* star fort is one example of a station that remained in the unexplored regions of the Periphery, waiting patiently for the advance of a crusade that had already ended. Dozens of Imperial Navy vessels had towed the enormous Ramilles-class star fort to the Helena II system, with the expectation that the crusade would eventually make use of it. Early plans intended for the system to be a critical junction for the next step in the crusade's expansion.

Instead, the crusade petered out. The vessels that had towed the station into place were reassigned to other vital missions. Soon, there were insufficient craft in the sub-sector to undertake the challenge of moving the fort, and its relocation remained on the Imperial Navy's roll of unassigned tasks for decades. All the while, other higher-priority tasks that required fewer craft were assigned to duty rosters for immediate resolution. Many of the station's crew were reassigned to other locations. Eventually, an Administratum scribe removed *Lycurgos* from its listings of active facilities, assuming that its continued presence was nothing more than an ongoing typographic error. An enormous and powerful piece of Imperial infrastructure was functionally discarded.

Without any support or supplies, the star fort's crew simply grew old and died during the centuries of isolation. The command staff maintained a skeleton crew by strictly rationing the remaining supplies, though by the time the station's commander decided that an attempt should be made to return *Lycurgos* to the more civilised worlds of the Calixis Sector, there were not enough functioning vessels in the system to transport it. Instead, the enormous star fort attempted to hold station in orbit around Helena II, for centuries. There it remained, with barely enough power to maintain but a fraction of its atmosphere and a subset of its systems, drawing what resources it could from the nearby habitable planet.

When humanity once more began active expansion into the Periphery sub-sector, explorers rediscovered *Lycurgos*. By that point, only a few of the station's servitors remained operational. These tireless automatons had continued to perform their last orders, keeping the station's essential systems functional, scavenging whatever equipment they could to do so.



REDISCOVERY

With the colonisation of Helena II, Imperial Navy craft could hardly ignore the existence of the derelict star fort. Its presence in the planet's orbit was enough to alter the world's tidal patterns. Augur arrays immediately indicated that, contrary to all appearances, the enormous station still had active plasma generators. The commanders of several vessels began scouring ancient logs of the system as they scurried to claim temporary authority over the station.

It was clear to all that successfully recovering the star fort could lead to rapid promotion. Even if that were not the immediate result, holding such a potent resource in such an isolated region would garner enormous prestige. Certainly, anyone who could assume command would be able to use their own vessel as well as the station to persuade others to back down from any confrontation.

Rogue Trader Captain Jacoby Meddington of the light cruiser *Blind Faith* was the first captain to successfully identify the star fort as the *Lycurgos*. With that knowledge, he committed his craft and crew to a docking attempt with the station. As he approached, he broadcast a claim of authority to the station, stating its name and citing his warrant of trade. His command broadcast was scarcely sent before Howarth Kenningsly, Rear Admiral of Imperial Navy broadcast his battlefleet's claim to the star fort. Unwilling to relinquish his new, and valuable, acquisition, the Rogue Trader opened fire on the Navy's vessels.

FACTIONS OF WARZONE EPSILON

"The men of distant Terra do not know us or care about us. We fight because they would destroy our world on a whim without recompense if it could satisfy the least of their desires."

—General Frederique Constantine

Control of Warzone Epsilon has been a conflict involving only humans—albeit millions of humans. The forces of the Severan Dominate continue to contest the system against soldiers who remain loyal to the Imperium of Man. The Orks, so active in other portions of the Spinward Front, have not yet penetrated this system. Duke Severus never brought his Dark Eldar allies to the world, as he could ill-afford to risk its bounty. To the outside observer, this has made the battle a veritable mirror's image of similarly armed and equipped forces assaulting one another with comparable tactics. Both sides have a strategic background grounded in the ancient traditions of the Imperium of Man. They recognise the approaches that their opponents take, and they recognise the counter moves as well. The war has had few surprises, as each side brings to bear equipment and tactics that the opponent expected.

THE SEVERAN DOMINATE

As the heir to the Severus dynasty, Duke Severus XIII began his life as a member of the Calixis Sector nobility. However, he had little chance to retain anything more than the title. His family's assets had been squandered over the centuries since the Angevin Crusade. The majority of those losses came as part of futile attempts to gain revenge against the blessed St. Drusus. His tremendous successes had taken all of the glory and grandeur from the triumphs of the first Duke Severus, which left the capable warrior an irate and disconsolate shell of a man.

His heirs constantly sought to somehow reverse this misfortune. They believed that with appropriate efforts, history could be rewritten, so that their line might be the one praised for service to the Emperor. Through a combination of hubris and incompetence, these plans never met with success. The ducal line squandered holding after holding as part of their futile quest.

As he came to maturity, Duke Severus XIII recognised the mistakes that his line had made. Instead of continuing to tread that same path, he chose to take a decidedly different approach. Perhaps the shrewdest and most conniving member of his lineage, the Duke knew that he must first achieve some notoriety for himself within the Imperium. Through hard effort and false shows of loyalty, he managed to earn the rank of Lord Sub-Sector of the Periphery. At last, a member of the Severus clan had attained control over the worlds that the line's founder had worked so hard to conquer for the Imperium centuries earlier.

Of course, this was scarcely enough to satisfy the Duke's ego. Recognised authority was a beginning, but he remained answerable to Imperial authorities. In his twisted mind, this could never be acceptable, for in the traditions of the Severus line he felt that he

owed no debt of allegiance to any higher power. To further his quest, he began the lengthy process of consolidating his holdings and assuring its self-sufficiency. Expanding his contacts within the Periphery sub-sector and the worlds beyond it, he began to exert his influence on those worlds. Production was gradually shifted on many worlds and military enrolment was gradually increased, so that he could carefully create a military force.

His plan met with its first major catastrophe when Waaagh! Grimtoof erupted into the region. The military assets he had begun to assemble were unable to resist the endless green tide. World after world fell to the xenos, and the Duke became incapable of engaging those forces while meeting his obligations to the Calixis Sector. In an act of desperation, he reached out to the Imperium for assistance against the hordes.

Of course, when those forces arrived, they could hardly miss the changes the Duke had already begun to enact. Rather than face the consequences of his crimes, the Duke seceded from the Imperium, forming the Severan Dominate. Imperial forces sent to battle the Orks now faced a two-front battle against both the human rebels and the xenos threat. The Calixis Sector had no choice but to send in additional units, so that the rebellion could be put down.

Some worlds had already been restored to the Imperium, but the war effort is multifaceted. In his desperation, the Duke reached out to the Dark Eldar for assistance. He willingly sacrificed hundreds of thousands of the Severan Dominate's citizens to the xenos so that he could sustain his struggling interplanetary domain. As he has battled to retain power, the Duke and his advisors have had to reprioritise the importance of his holdings. Defenders and military assets had been transferred from many less vital worlds to those that must be held.

Warzone Epsilon is a system that fell into the vital category. With its location as a Warp junction and its agricultural fecundity, the Severan Dominate cannot afford to lose control over the system. Assets were transferred from worlds deemed far less likely to come under either Imperial or Ork assault. Several of these were left functionally defenceless, scarcely capable of repelling a serious attack by any invading force.

On some worlds, the physical assets were more vital than the population. In these instances, Duke Severus could readily sacrifice a portion of the inhabitants to his xenos allies in exchange for assistance against the Imperium of Man. However, the citizens of Warzone Epsilon are an absolute necessity. Without their presence, it would be impossible for the planet to maintain its agricultural productivity. In spite of the need for additional defenders—the Duke's advisors soon realised that the Imperium would eventually make a concerted push to take the world—the Dark Eldar have not been involved on Helena II. If the Imperium were to gain the upper hand, the Duke could become desperate enough to change that. However, that crisis point has not yet arrived. Of course, if the situation were dire, it is certain that the xenos would increase the amount of compensation expected for a rapid intervention.

When the Imperium first began their reclamation of Helena II, the majority of the planet's defenders were agricultural serfs. However, the Helena II Harvest Guard proved to be a less than capable defensive force. Their tactical acumen and combat training was hardly a match for the disciplined soldiers of the