

Full Excerpt: Hulls and Hearts

There is an old saying among the dock crews of the Ravenhearst, passed down through enough generations of shipwrights that nobody remembers who said it first:

"A ship is named thrice: Once when she is initiated, once when she earns it, and once when the galaxy itself takes notice of her."

Most civilians, when they hear this, assume it is poetry. I assure you, it is not.

It is, in fact, one of the most literal descriptions of UHF naval administration you will ever encounter, and understanding it means understanding something fundamental about how the Navy thinks of its Troop Transporters—not as vessels, but as living participants in the same career ladder their own crew and the UHF Marine Corps climb alongside her.

Let me walk you through the life of such a ship.

The First Name

Every Troop Transporter in UHF service begins its life—or gets reinitiated—with a baseline name, and that name is determined not by the Navy at large, but by the *quadrant* of UHF space in which the vessel serves.

Each quadrant maintains its own naming tradition, jealously guarded and many centuries old, and any Navy officer can tell you where a ship hails from simply by hearing what she is *called*.

The South-Western quadrant—encompassing the Driftspire, Halcyon, Krynnal, and Kuigon Sectors, among several others—names its Troop Transporters after figures of authority and the pinnacles of old: *The Sovereign. The Empyrean. The Ascendant. The Monarch.*

Names that sit on the tongue like a crown sat upon the brow of ancient Terran rulers.

The tradition dates back to the quadrant's founding fleets, and the ships that carry these names are expected—by their crews, if not by regulation—to live up to them.

The North-Western quadrant, by contrast, names its Transporters after the great storms—the vast, indifferent weathers of the worlds humanity has settled and survived: *The Tempest. The Aurora. The Torrent. The Thunderhead.*

Where the South-West looks upward to thrones, the North-West looks outward to the sky.

The other quadrants maintain their own schemes as well, of course, but the principle is universal, and so is the rule that gives the entire system its peculiar character:

There may only ever be one of each baseline name in service at a time.

There can only be one *Sovereign*. Only one *Monarch*. Only one *Tempest*.

The name is not simply a label but a description of office, held by a single hull at a time, and it is only vacated in one of two ways—when the ship holding it dies, or when the ship holding it is *promoted*.

Which brings us to the second naming.

The Second Name

A Troop Transporter's first year of service in any cycle is spent as a Recruit Ship.

She collects her Recruits from the Recruitment HQ Stations of her quadrant, and for that first year—throughout their training, their Assessments, their first fumbling steps into the machinery of the Corps—she is simply herself.

The Sovereign. The Tempest.

The baseline name, held plainly, the way a Recruit holds a rank that is barely a rank at all.

But then comes the ceremony.

When the Recruits aboard complete their first year and are formally promoted to Private, the ship is promoted *alongside* them. This is not merely a metaphor nor is it a courtesy—it is a formal naval ceremony, conducted with *full honors*, in which the vessel herself receives her Suffix and, with it, her elevation to a proper Ship-of-the-Line.

The Suffix traditions are naturally, once again, quadrant-specific.

The South-Western quadrant appends an uncountable, undefined vastness—a thing without edge or number: *The Empyrean of Stars. The Empyrean of Sands. The Empyrean of Seas.*

Three ships, three separate careers, all descended from the same baseline office, each now distinguished by the particular infinity she carries.

The choice of vastness is traditionally made by the ship's governing AI in consultation with her longest-serving crew, and the selections are recorded in quadrant registries going back to the very foundation of the UHF itself.

The North-Western quadrant does it differently, as do all the quadrants within UHF space.

Its storms are not given a domain but *permanence*.

The suffix is postpositive, a single word of *endurance* set after the name like a vow: *The Tempest Unending. The Tempest Unbroken. The Tempest Everlasting.*

A storm, the dock crews aboard the Ravenhearst will tell you, if only you ask, does not need a sea or a sky to rage over. It needs only to refuse to ever stop.

Now, the moment the Suffix is bestowed, the baseline name is freed.

Somewhere in the quadrant's shipyards, a new hull—or an old one, returned for her next cycle—takes up the vacated office, and there is a *Sovereign* again, and a *Tempest* again,

beginning the year with a fresh complement of Recruits who have no idea they are part of a rotation older than most colony worlds within the Bubble.

The newly named Ship-of-the-Line, meanwhile, goes to *war*.

She deploys to the frontlines with her Marines—the same Marines she trained, now Privates and Corporals and, in time, Sergeants, Majors, and maybe even Generals—and she serves with them for as long as the war permits.

Years, in the fortunate cases. Decades, in the legendary ones. She carries them from Battlefield to Battlefield, and her name accrues the weight of everything they do together.

Until the day comes when the ledger runs *too deep*.

When a Ship-of-the-Line's Marine complement falls below critical strength—through casualties, through transfers, through the slow attrition that no vessel escapes forever—she is called back from the front.

Her surviving Marines are merged into other Ships-of-the-Line carrying the same baseline heritage, folded into crews whose ships were once, in a sense, her sisters.

And the ship herself, emptied of the people she was promoted alongside, is formally demoted—stripped of her Suffix, returned to the shipyards, and restored to her baseline office to await a new generation of Recruits.

The cycle begins again. A new first year. A new ceremony. A new vastness, or a new vow.

The dock crews of the Ravenhearst will tell you that no ship ever chooses the same Suffix twice, and while the registries do show a handful of exceptions, the tradition holds true often enough that spacers consider a repeated Suffix to be an omen—though nobody can truly agree on an omen of exactly *what*; positive or negative.

The Third Name

Lastly, there is the naming that no ceremony can schedule.

The Prefix is the rarest honor in the UHF Navy—an Achievement recognized not by any singular quadrant, but by the entire UHF proper.

Where baseline names are offices and Suffixes are promotions, the Prefix is something closer to canonization.

It is bestowed only for feats of galactic significance, and while it is formally awarded to the vessel, every spacer knows that a Prefix is earned jointly—by the hull, by her governing AI, and most often by the long-serving Captain whose career became inseparable from hers.

“Indomitable,” for ships that have very rarely lost a Battlefield they were part of.

“Elusive,” for ships that have slipped the enemy's closing grasp so many times that opposing fleet doctrine names them specifically.

“Galactic,” for ships that have—beyond a shadow of a doubt—helped create at least one Major Strategic Asset for the UHF, and ferried them to the Battlefields where they were needed most.

There is one major difference between the way this honor works, compared to the baseline promotion carrying the Suffix: **The Prefix *never* comes off.**

Suffixes are granted and stripped with every cycle. Baseline names are held and vacated like watch rotations. But a Prefix survives demotion, recycling, and *every* return to the shipyards.

A Recruit Ship carrying a Prefix is not a contradiction in any way. She is merely an old, experienced veteran, teaching the new generations everything she knows.

The “*Indomitable Empyrean*” collecting her wide-eyed Recruits from a Sector station is the very same Soul that held whatever line earned her that word, and the Navy sees no reason a new generation shouldn't know it from the moment they first step aboard.

The Prefix ends only two ways: With the destruction of the hull in its entirety, or with the expiration of her governing AI.

For the Prefix, as the commissioning liturgy has it, is not merely *attached* to the *ship*.

It is *fused* to the heart and very *Soul* of her.

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[Excerpt from "Hulls and Hearts: An Informal History of the UHF Navy's Living Traditions" — Fleet Archivist (Ret.) Cha'Relle Bun'Da, Ravenhearst Navy Academy, PFC 929]