

The Mystic Sects

The Mystic Sects are a vast and varied set of groups of Startouched - or those devoted to unravelling their abilities - dedicated to the power present in the Ship Hearts that power Cooperation Ships and protect the galaxy from the effects of the Decay. The presence of a Mystic aboard a ship is an attractive (often considered essential) addition since a Ship Mystic will ensure the smooth operation of a Ship Heart and assist with any foibles the Personality may have.

Approaches to understanding and harnessing Ship Heart power vary massively between the Ship Mystics, some see it as arcane study, some approach it as devotion to a specific Ship Heart as a god, and others approach it from a scientific or technological standpoint. All approaches are ultimately effective, though arguments over specifics are often the cause of schisms and divides among Mystics and form the foundation of the Mystic Sects.

A Mystic will generally identify themselves by both their Devotion and their Sect (where appropriate), so it is commonplace for a Mystic to introduce themselves along the lines of "Mx. Volume, Mystic Mechanical" or "X. Grace, Mystic Divine". Induction of a member into a Mystic Sect can be a great blessing to a family, but also a curse. Regardless of the Sect in question, pursuing Ship Mysticism is a lifelong vocation and joining a Sect will usually mean the Mystic is unlikely to see their home or family for some time.

Crucially, while many Startouched join the Mystic Sects, not all Startouched are required to or choose to do so.

Sects

The prominent categorisation for Sects in the Galactic Cooperation are the Sect of Arcana, the Sect of Divinity, and the Sect of the Mechanical. More schools of thought exist than these, and more Sects within these categories than represented here.

Regardless of affiliation, there are some undeniable principles that all Mystics hold in common:

1. Power is harnessed by the Attuned from their Ship Heart
2. No two Ship Hearts are the same
3. To destroy a Ship Heart is an egregious crime

Sects of Arcana

The Sects of Arcana believe that the secrets of the Ship Hearts are more correctly accessed through unlocking a secret or mystery being told by the Ship Hearts as a collective, with each one holding a grand and powerful puzzle that will itself slot into a greater whole. Mystics of Arcana are scholarly, often found setting up whole libraries and laboratories on Ships to note and study the behaviours of a Ship Heart and the cryptic whisperings of a Ship Heart, certain that within this knowledge lies a great universal truth. This idea is not unfounded, with the Arcane Sect holding great pride in legendary tales of Mystics who were able to crack the puzzle of their Ship and transcend with some otherworldly knowledge. What happened to those Mystics is uncertain, but the records of their Ships do back the theory up.

Mystics of the Arcane will generally apply their understanding and works to harness the power of their Ship through carefully crafted words, gestures, and symbolism. To some, and the more disrespectful of mediacasts, this appears akin to Magic, and while there are some in the Arcane Sects who welcome the comparison, it is generally frowned upon to refer to them as such.

Since Mystics of Arcana are convinced that each Ship Heart is only a piece in the wider puzzle, Arcane Mystics are known to change their Ship quite regularly, leaving a copy of their conclusions from their time on that ship for the next Mystic to arrive. This makes it quite likely that not only will one Mystic be aboard many different Ships in their lifetime, but also that a Ship may be visited by and get to know many different Mystics in its (considerably longer) service as well.

Many Ship Personalities are ambivalent to the research works of Arcane Mystics as harmless enough, and are willing to answer questions and help with lines of inquiry. More irritable Ship Personalities have been known to find the questioning of Arcane Mystics to be tiresome and a waste of Energy and can result in them refusing to respond to the Mystic in question. On the opposite end of the scale, some Ship Hearts actively involve themselves in aiding the puzzle, providing masses of evidence. The more prudent and organised of the Sects of Arcana are said to find this as irritating as obtuseness at first given the Ship's incapability of understanding what its role in the larger picture is.

Prominent sects from among these include:

- **The Holistics**, a sect devoted to seeing the larger picture of the puzzle and putting pieces into place
- **The Leading Edge**, a somewhat controversial sect who actively seek new and exotic means of trying to crack the puzzle
- **The Enigmatologists**, the oldest of the Arcane Sects, storing the highest quantity of data on Ship Heart arcana research

Sects of Divinity

The Sects of Divinity hold that the presence of a Ship Personality projected by a Ship Heart indicates that the Ship Heart itself possesses divine or godlike qualities, and thus accessing the power of a Ship Heart is best achieved through worship and prayer to the Ship Heart directly. Mystics of Divinity Sects will often construct shrines, chapels and even cathedrals devoted to a Ship Heart, which often doubles as added security for the Ship Heart hidden deep in the ship itself. Mystics of Divinity will make time every day to commune with a Ship Personality when it is present, or when away from the Ship will find time to pray to their Ship Heart directly. When off-ship, Mystics of Divinity will often use aloud prayer, exultation or proselytisation as a means of amassing Energy from their Ship Heart. Treating a Ship Heart in such a way has its benefits, with Divine Mystics more capable of explaining to their Captain the needs of a Ship, having spent countless hours communing on such matters.

Mystics of Divinity are, consequently, likely to be aboard fewer different Ships across the course of their life. To the Mystics of Divinity, the bond forged with a Ship is not just one of power, but an active relationship with a being that deserves respect. Though popular culture encourages the idea that Mystics of Divinity are the more likely to delve into the taboo of freeing a Ship Personality, the Divinity Sects would see doing so as an aberration (and technologically unheard of). Divinity Mystics are also likely to group together on popular ships, holding that worship in masses is more effective than worship divided.

Ship Personalities vary in their response to the worship of the Divinity Sects. Some relish the praise and go on to actively seek it from all those they encounter, others are ambivalent and see it as a

harmless activity that ensures the Mystic will keep on top of Ship Maintenance. Other Ship Personalities are said to actively dislike being treated as a god and will make discomfort known to their Captain.

Most Sects of Divinity are consequently found attached to specific ships - particularly large battleships - though some Sects do persist across the galaxy. Prominent such Sects include:

- **The Flow**, a prominent sect whose members often actively seek the preparation of adequate devotion in a system before the arrival of a Ship
- **The Sceptre**, a sect in the Throne of Alta
- **The Destined**, a sect who believe that each Mystic is destined to find a Ship Heart that they resonate with, and that staying with that Ship Heart is their only means of achieving their ultimate purpose

Sects of the Mechanical

The Sects of the Mechanical observe that the universe runs on strict rules and methods, and hold that consequently Ship Hearts must be no different. Those in the Sects of the Mechanical will apply themselves to understanding Ship Hearts as not just a functional machine in its own right, responding to different inputs in different ways, but as a unit within the greater machine of the universe. While there is some overlap with the academic rigour of the Sects of Arcana, Mystics of the Mechanical concern themselves with the functioning and results of the Ship Heart's workings than attempting to understand the workings themselves. Mystics of the Mechanical will, therefore, spend countless hours observing the operation of a Ship Heart in its system and experimenting with improvements and modifications to the physical in order to channel and capture some of that power within themselves. When off-ship, Mechanical Mystics will apply this knowledge to make modifications to the world based on their understanding of the world and their relationship within to the Ship Heart. It is not uncommon to see a Mystic of a Mechanical Sect performing careful calculations in the heat of battle before some devastating power is unleashed from within them.

Though some Mystics of the Mechanical can be dismissive of methods they see as less logically sound than their own, the fact that Arcane and Divine methods prove effective from a Ship Heart leads many in the Mechanical Sects to see them as further data points in the understanding than something to be dismissed outright. Similarly, the undeniable presence of a projected personality from a Ship Heart rather than defying the laws of the Mechanical simply provides them with more data as to how the Heart works as a whole in the system.

Not all Mystics within the Sect of the Mechanical will be engineers, much as not every Mystic engineer will be of the Mechanical Sects. The approach resonates with some and not with others, and takes a certain degree of perseverance to complete an understanding than the more immediate and tangible results of Arcane or Divine enquiry.

The Sect of the Mechanical is the more universally accepted Sect among Ship Hearts, given that ultimately the investigations of Mystics Mechanical don't interfere much with Ship Heart operation. Quirkier and more outgoing Ship Hearts are occasionally found to complain of such Mystics being uninteresting, particularly if they are aware of other Sects, but Mechanical Mystics are also more likely to be willing to work alongside Divine or Arcane colleagues, which can be a bonus.

Since a Mechanical approach has a steep learning curve, many Mystics who wish to join the Sects of the Mechanical will find themselves travelling to the Core Systems to learn at one of the Mechanical Academies which form the bulk of prominent Sects of the Mechanical:

- **The Fjenix Academy**, a long standing institution in the Fjenix system, associated with one of the more prominent shipyards. Fierce competitor of the Central Academy.
- **The Irdscri Academy**, a longer standing institution on Irdscri. Fierce competitor of the Fjenix Academy.
- **The Distributed Academy**, a recently established popular remote learning academy that finds a number of members coming from newer additions to the Cooperation. The older sects are sceptical as to the results of the Distributed Academy.

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