



CONVERGENCE OF CYRISS

VARIABLES

MACHINATIONS CHAPTER 3

The perfection of Cyriss requires both simplicity and elegance.

—Fluxion Hericratus

Father Lucant stood in front of the primary entrance to the Foundry of Astroseismology, an underground temple complex built by the Convergence of Cyriss within the heart of the Llaeese mountains. He watched his clockwork soldiers take up their positions as he moved his sizable battlegroup into proper alignment. Unlike the cortexes of common warjacks that attempted to replicate intelligence, vectors were pure extensions of the warcaster's will, free from the blasphemy of artificial intelligence. Without the direct influence of a controlling warcaster, a vector was unable to perform even the simplest of functions. While the need for constant connection might have seemed extraordinary to other warcasters, the lack of sentience within vectors made controlling them far simpler. Unlike with their more temperamental counterparts, Lucant did not have to contend with an opposing artificial consciousness, making controlling even a large number of vectors as simple and natural as moving the fingers on one's hand.

He had waited years for the moment when he could lead the faithful of Cyriss back to this place and reclaim it from the depredations of the cephalyx. The Convergence had not been at liberty to deploy an army sufficient to the task until now, so they had reluctantly allowed the site and its powerful machinery to be despoiled by these most wretched of beings. Lucant intimately understood the need for sacrifices, but the knowledge of what had befallen this foundry had greatly troubled him.

With the Phase of Alignment now upon them, the reclamation of the Foundry of Astroseismology had become critical, as the temple would serve as a cornerstone in Iron Mother Directrix's plans for the mountains north of Llael. Knowing the battle to eliminate the cephalyx from the complex would be extremely difficult, Lucant had gladly taken lead of the army sent to restore it to Convergence control.

Though he had led the faithful of Cyriss in battle countless times over his two hundred and fifty years of existence, the sight of their perfect fluidity and synchronicity of movement

still caused him to marvel at the wonder of the Maiden of Gears. Watching through the many ocular lenses of his vectors as well as his own, Lucant could see the dynamic constants of each soldier as they coalesced to create a much greater equation of motion. The moment would have been sublime if not for the fact that the equation had already been spoiled by an undefined variable.

The tinge of divine revelation faded to be replaced by agitation as Lucant turned his thoughts to the encroaching mercenary army. Their unexpected appearance had put everything he had planned into flux. Though he was confident he had recalculated his course of action appropriately, he was acutely aware of the difficulty inherent in trying to predict the results of the incoming army's interference. Lucant had become aware of the mercenary army after he had begun to execute his original plan of attack against the cephalyx. Though the force he had brought to the foundry's primary entrance was significant, it represented only a fraction of his entire force. The bulk of that force was now moving toward the facility's anterior entrance on the windward side of the mountain. Lucant's original plan had been to assault the cephalyx from both entrances. With the appearance of the mercenary army, however, it was Lucant's force that faced the danger of being caught between two hostile groups.

Based on his calculations, he was confident that by recalling the rest of his army to him his force could overcome both foes, but the projected losses would be unacceptable if they were to further the grand design within the foundry. Lucant could not allow anything to jeopardize the reclamation effort. No, he would need to preserve as much of his strength as possible in order to annihilate the cephalyx swiftly while retaining a significant enough force to defend the foundry and begin the process of restoring it to full operational capacity. It had been in that thought that he had found the solution. He could manipulate the new variable to his own advantage.

Lucant planned to use the mercenary army and their clash on the surface as a distraction. He knew a full-scale battle near the primary entrance would undoubtedly draw the attention of the cephalyx. Once the enemy had been roused, Lucant's force would pull out and rejoin the anterior assault force.

As if bidden by his thoughts, the vanguard of the mercenary army began to appear upon the rise that led down to the plain before the entrance to the Foundry of Astroseismology. Needing to issue no commands, Lucant raised his staff Apogee and pointed toward the mercenary lines, signaling his forces to attack.

Lines of obstructors marched shoulder-to-shoulder, the interlocking mechanisms of their heavy shields turning them into a solid wall of chromed steel behind which the rest of the army advanced. Lucant once again took in the situation ahead of him aided by his ability to effortlessly see through the visual apparatus of the numerous vectors that composed his battlegroup. He quickly calculated the precise points to target in the mercenary army and impelled his vectors to close with the enemy forces. Despite the myriad individual actions required of each vector, the machines' ingenious interface nodes allowed him to coordinate their actions with perfect precision.

A line of Steelhead riflemen were forming up at the front of the enemy army and leveling their rifles toward the advancing Convergence line. Lucant drew upon his arcane power, and a palpable glow of energy blazed about his spider-like form as runes began to form at his command. With practiced exactness Lucant shaped the manifested symbols into the proper alignment, mirroring the celestial alignments of the Maiden. The runes glowed brightly as interweaving lines surged and pulsed like the very geomantic flows that lay beneath Caen until with a sudden burst the spell enveloped Lucant's forces within a shimmering kinetic distortion.

Fire erupted from the barrels of the Steelhead rifles. As the heavy rounds struck the shimmering field, their forward energy was stripped from them—and with it their lethality. The sound of heavy mortars thumped, and Lucant watched as the highly explosive rounds slowed like they were trying



to move through viscous fluid as they began their descent through his protective barrier. Despite the chaotic alchemical principles involved in the detonations, their effects held a particular beauty when slowed this way. Lucant could almost see the equations of the Maiden within the fiery explosions, imperfect as their design might be.

Focusing his vision through the eyes of one of his Monitors, Lucant took aim at the front line of Steelheads. The rapidly building whine of the vector's ellipsaw flinger buzzed in his ears. With a metallic screech the heavy circular blade shot forth on the curving arc Lucant had calculated for maximum carnage. The blade bifurcated one of the riflemen at a forty-five degree angle, causing viscera to spray across his horrified comrades. Their terror was short-lived, however. Utilizing the macabre distraction caused by the Monitor, Lucant had positioned his Mitigator just within razor bola range. The wicked steel bola now unfolded and enveloped the tight formation of Steelheads. Men barely had time to scream as the precisely forged web of steel tore through vital organs and armor, hopelessly entangling those it failed to outright kill within its razor-sharp embrace.

A massive Inverter charged a Nomad, spreading panic across the faces of the mercenaries nearby as it sent the mighty mercenary warjack crashing to the ground with a steel-buckling strike from the vector's macropummmer. Four thunderous peals sounded as the Inverter followed up the initial blow with the its meteor hammer, the heavy ball of the

chain weapon splitting the Nomad's thick steel armor like a walnut before shattering the delicate internal workings. A bright shower of sparks erupted, and the heartfire in the machine's eyes faded to black.

Lucant commanded his two Assimilators to fire their dissevering microswarms into a tight cluster of Forge Guard that was moving up to bolster the faltering Steelhead line. He felt the vectors tremble slightly as the force of their weapons firing rocked them back, their arcane displacer drives pulsing to keep them aloft. Lucant watched as the projectiles exploded in midair, showering the Forge Guard lines with a brutal rain of spinning, bladed gears. The first shot brought down several of the Rhulfolk despite their heavy armor, weakening their impenetrable line for the second Assimilator's follow-up attack. Those Forge Guard whose comrades had already fallen were quickly cut down by the second dissevering swarm blast.

The Convergence leader quickly assessed various courses of action, determining points of stress where proper application of force would provide the greatest result. He did not see the battlefield as a mass of soldiers or units. To his mind's eye everything that was unfolding was akin to an engineering schematic. The soldiers, both enemy and friendly, were simply components within the greater whole of the machine that was the battle itself. And like any machine, he only had to apply the proper logic and manipulation of its constituent parts to generate the desired outcome.

He raised his staff Apogee and triggered its internal mechanika to cause the end to pulse three times, signaling his prefects to begin the all-out assault. The pace of his troops quickened with perfect synchronicity as they charged forward. To the eyes of an enemy used to the tumult of battle, Lucant knew that such exactitude would appear almost mystical. The psychological effect that the precise and wordless coordination of the Convergence fighting forces had on opposing armies was as powerful a weapon as any used by an individual soldier—a weapon Lucant had long ago learned how to exploit to greatest effect.

A soft whine of gears and servos pulled Lucant's focus back to his own body as Forge Engineer Solomnus approached. "Divinity Architect, we have word from the angels you posted to watch the primary tunnel. The cephalyx are taking the bait as you surmised they would."

Though the forge engineer's vocal apparatus was as artificial as Lucant's own, the warcaster could still sense awe in Solomnus' voice. He knew this was inspired by his physical form as much as by his venerated role as divinity architect. Lucant had designed his clockwork body to suit the status of his role. Nearly twice the height of the average clockwork vessel, Lucant's form was an iteration of the



original vessel Forge Master Lucidia and Fluxion Helicratus had designed when the Convergence was first striving to accomplish the transfer of a human soul. Though the vessel had proven too complex for use among the majority of their soldiers, who adapted faster to more humanoid forms, it remained a powerful reminder of the Convergence's greater accomplishments. And though he would not admit it to anyone, Lucant felt attached to the form, whether from nostalgia or because of some deeper connection.

"Nothing in this world exists beyond the Maiden's design, Solomnus, least of all the mindless and deluded predations of our hated foe." Lucant could not keep the fire from his voice as he thought of the cephalyx. "The creatures are like pests that spoil the harvest. Their elimination is a matter of necessity." He turned to face the forge engineer. Solomnus' four arms twitched, the soft whir and click of gears and servos adjusting punctuating the man's nervousness. "This is your first battlefield engagement, is it not?" Lucant asked. In the small space between the question and answer, he impelled his Monitor to charge an enemy Talon that was engaging several eradicators, taking some small measure of enjoyment from ripping apart the light 'jack with the Monitor's powerful spring-spike fist.



"Yes, Father. I have never seen battle with my own eyes." Solomnus paused for a moment, his form shifting slightly as if he were weighing his next words. "I have not actually been outside the Temple of Enumerative Configuration since my initiation to the inner circle five years ago."

Lucant nodded slightly. He knew Solomnus' past. The man had proven to be a rather remarkable discovery, if a completely unexpected one, demonstrating the rare ability to translate complex abstract principles into practical designs. "Your skills in voltaics and geomantic energy conduction will be crucial to restoring this temple once we reclaim it from the vermin that now inhabit it."

"They are an affront to the truth of the Maiden," Solomnus said.

Lucant nodded slightly at the forge engineer. "One we shall suffer no longer." He raised Apogee and flicked its activation switch, sending a brief pulse of light from its end. It was the signal for his prefects to begin withdrawing. The Convergence must be gone before the cephalyx arrived in order to keep their presence hidden.

The forge engineer's vocal modulator hissed as if he were about to say something but thought better of it.

"Does something trouble you, Solomnus?" Lucant prodded.

The forge engineer's hands twitched nervously as if playing with something that wasn't there. Finally he said, "What of these mercenaries and their role in your grand design?"

"They will serve to distract our enemy while we execute the Maiden's will."

"You expect our foe will destroy them, then?"

"They are off balance. Weakened from our own assault. The probability of them standing against the approaching cephalyx is infinitesimal."

"Pardon my impetuosity, Father, but what if they somehow succeed against the cephalyx?"

Lucant looked back to the mercenary army, seeing it through the myriad eyes of his vectors as well as his own. Despite the ferocity of the attack he could sense something greater, some stronger purpose of will within them. Something he knew none of his equations could accurately account for.

"Like any variable, we will integrate them into the primary equation." Lucant's grip tightened around Apogee. "All according to the Maiden's design."

