Starfleet’s Comeback Kids

How the long-maligned Ambassador-class heavy cruiser found itself a new prominence in 2410.

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• Interview with Admiral T’Nae of the Loma Prieta: Front Line Duties of the Ambassador-class.
• Rumors of a Temporally Displaced Ambassador: Temporal Integrity Commission Says Otherwise.
The Comeback Kids

Starfleet’s Famously Underpowered Aging Heavy Cruiser Finds a Rebirth in the Present Day

In the ashes of the Iconian War, a surprising starship rises from the ashes to claim the intentions of its original designer. The Ambassador-class Support Cruiser’s rebirth hopes to have the last laugh in the history books that wrote it off as an underpowered hunk of junk.
Ninety-One Years ago, on stardate 14177.48, a new heavy cruiser of the Federation left drydock at Hela-spton Station. This vessel, the prototype U.S.S. Ambassador, was scheduled to become the new flagship of the Federation, and left with cheers of celebration. Less than twelve hours later, the ship was back in dock, half its power system having blown out several key systems. So began a nearly century long problem with the Ambassador-class Heavy Cruiser: a ship meant to be the pinnacle of Federation technology through the early 24th Century, quickly developed a reputation as one of the most finicky and temperamental starships of the fleet.

Now, in 2410, the Ambassador-class (or “Amby” as it is called by their equally temperamental captains) has found itself back on the front lines. Whether it is Admiral T’Nae’s flagship, the U.S.S. Loma Prieta, or the various Ambassadors brought out of mothballs in the wake of the Iconian War, the ship class has gained a new reputation among Starfleet personnel: Starfleet’s Comeback Kid.

Jayce’s Navy Interstellar is fortunate enough to have received exclusive access to the active duty U.S.S. Rhea under the command of Captain Brendan Ty Stevens, which at the time of this writing, was in Earth Spacedock for repairs and upgrades.

We met Captain Stevens and his first officer, Commander Miyazaki Kikyō just inside the port-side airlock on the neck of the Rhea, who both bowed respectfully and welcomed us aboard.

“I know it would have been more convenient to use a transporter to come aboard,” Captain Stevens said ushering us inside. “But I think to really appreciate a ship, you need board it manually. To walk under its saucer section and feel utterly dwarfed by it. It was my first impression of the Rhea, and I’ve never had any wanderlust to another ship as a result.”

After a brief tour of the vessel, Captain Stevens brought us to his ready room. A quirk of the Ambassador-class vessels is that the Captain’s ready room is on Deck 2 and directly connected to the ship’s observation lounge, complete with a rear view out of the large aft windows.

Captain Stevens, can you explain why the Ambassador-class until recently, had a reputation as a finicky and temperamental class?

“That’s a long answer! But, it’s best if I go back to the beginning. I’m sure you know that the U.S.S. Ambassador doesn’t look anything like the Rhea, or the Loma Prieta, or any of the other Ambassadors in the fleet at the moment. It looks more like a hybrid of the Excelsior-class advanced heavy cruisers and the Galaxy-class exploration cruisers. Which, it is. It was the major technological stepping stone. But that’s getting a bit off topic.

“The Ambassador is what’s now colloquially called the Ambassador-class Prototype or Block-I Ambassador. Very beautiful ship design, with lots of flowing details. The Admiral deserves praise for the design of the ship.”

So what happened to this prototype?

“It was too powerful for its own britches. The Admiral (then a Captain) wanted a ship that could do all the duties of the Excelsior, but do them better. It was supposed to be a show of Starfleet’s commitment to exploration and diplomacy. It had these extremely high end prototype positron deflectors at a time when Starfleet could barely run positronic anything. It had these very powerful impulse engines that, frankly, were a little overdesigned. I mean, it was a good design, but it outputted too much power. The Rhea has the compressed smaller version of that impulse drive and it still causes us to overshoot our destinations at times! Then you had its improved warp engines, the prototype phaser beam strips, an enhanced planetary sensor module… and all of that needed a very powerful power source.”

So what happened?

“Well, the warp core they installed was sufficient to power the ship’s systems. Problem was… EPS technology at the time wasn’t really capable of handling that power going to any system but the Warp Drive. At the low power settings, it could...
do everything as it was supposed to, which is why it was able to take its first test flight into an unexplored system. You may have seen that picture of it over the rings of two gas giants?"

That is the iconic image of that ship. “What that picture doesn’t show is 15 seconds later, the Ambassador’s impulse manifolds melted the power flow regulator and it started hurtling towards the debris field.”

Oh my…

“Yeah, that was not the SCE’s shining moment. So they turned on the deflector at full power, hoping to deflect the rocks in front of them. And that deflector was directly tied into the Warp Core, so they didn’t need to worry about the EPS system melting there too. However, the deflector was too powerful and instead of deflecting those space rocks, it created an artificial gravity well. So now, the Ambassador is hurtling towards a bunch of debris, their engines locked at full impulse, and now being pulled in by a gravity well they created.”

What happened next?

“Luckily, the test pilot on board was more clever than most, a brilliant young woman: Commander Rachel Garrett. She was able to nudge the Ambassador’s course so that it dodged the rocks and used the singularity they accidentally made as a sling shot out of the field. Their chief engineer was then able to depower the impulse engines, and they were able to warp back to base without too much further incident.”

And that’s the same block as the Rhea, correct?

“Actually, we’re a Block-III. A refit version of that design, but the basic spaceframe is the same, yes. But the original Block-IIs, oh, they had issues. Their power levels were kept as low as possible outside of their engines, and with their reinforced hulls, they were kind of… well, bluntly, a brick that could turn on a dime. Their phasers were woefully underpowered, the old Block-I Con- nies [Constitution-class heavy cruiser] could out damage them, their sensor suites were blurry and low resolution. And the downgraded deflectors? That just left them with basic space dust mover and a very underpowered shield grid. And the ships paid for that.”

You’re referring to the Enterprise-C, aren’t you? “Yeah, I am. That ship got ganged up on by three Dhael-class warbirds and she couldn’t target them worth a damn. Best she could do was dodge incoming fire, and with the reduced shields they had a lot of hull damage. Luckily, the upgraded hull reinforcements kept her in the fight longer than expected and plenty of Klingons escaped Narendra. But the loss of the Enterprise was a big loss for Starfleet. So the Galaxy-class project was pulled into overdrive and the Ambys began being researched for their refits.”

The reinforced duranium hull plating of this class saved many during the Iconian War.

What’s in a designation?

The original Ambassadors up until the launch of the Block-III/A variants were designated as Heavy Cruisers, indicating a heavy engineering-based hull and functionality, focused on hull plating and defense.

With the introduction of the III/A variant, the class has received a new designation: Fleet Support Cruiser Retrofit. Modern versions of the Ambassador including refitted and newly constructed models have increased science-based equipment including the restoration of the Block-I’s high power deflector model, redesigned for the Block-II and later hull. This results in a ship with high powered sensor suites and the ability to create powerful sub-space anomalies such as gravity wells and Tyken’s Rifts.

![The reinforced duranium hull plating of this class saved many during the Iconian War.](image)

![Powerful warp engines installed in each Ambassador-class are capable of sustained cruise velocities of warp 9.85.](image)

![The Block-I Ambassador Probert’s Prototype](image)

The Block-I Ambassador-class, of which the only member is the prototype U.S.S. Ambassador, was intended to take Starfleet into the 24th Century. A successor to the highly successful Excelsior-class starship, the Ambassador was packed full of prototype technologies. Unfortunately, the ship was a victim of its own power systems. Early 24th Century EPS conduits were insufficient to properly power the vessel and during its shakedown cruise, melted down, nearly destroying the prototype vessel. Starfleet Command cut resource allocation to the Ambassador Project and demanded a redesign. Since then, it has been in storage at Utopia Planitia, occasionally used as a museum ship. Rumors of the ship’s refit with modern systems remain unconfirmed.

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"That sounds like the worst shakedown in Starfleet history! “It was! So they comeback to dock with the then-Captain getting chewed out by command, when really, Utopia Planitia’s staff had assured him the EPS systems would have worked right, and him getting pulled off the project. Another designer was then put in charge of it and is immediately informed that Starfleet is pulling about a third of the resources to build these ships and he needs to redesign them to accommodate. So he simplifies the hull to basic shapes, and downgrades virtually all of the equipment onboard, he moves the nacelles up in the pylons so that the bussard collectors are partially obstructed by the saucer section and therefore take in less matter to create excess energy, and the hull materials are changed to focus on structural stability over scientific prowess. Its engines were made smaller, but still very powerful. And that’s how the Block-II Amby was born.”

"Too much further incident!?"

“Well, she was still too overpowered for her systems. A few consoles exploded, their sickbay labs had some forcefields throwing people around, food replicators giving people too much coffee for their cups…”

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An artist's rendition of the Siege of Vulcan by Sela's forces in 2409, where the Loma Prieta played a key role.
These are the Block-III Ambassadors, I assume?

“Yes. So they redid the deflector arrays to match the upcoming Galaxys, with the Ambassadors prototyping the upgraded positron deflector dishes, while also shortening the pylons and using a new version of warp coils and bussard collectors for a more efficient warp engines. They also corrected a design flaw in the Block-IIs where the saucer section was mounted about 20 meters forward of where it should have been on the neck. But unfortunately, a lot of the underpowered equipment was left intact because Starfleet was throwing all its eggs in the Galaxy-class project. And that was a mistake.”

How is that?

“The Galaxy has the same structural weaknesses as the prototype Ambry. If you want to see how that turned out for it, go compare how the Enterprise-C and Enterprise-D were both lost. The C fought three ships contemporary to it and fought valiantly to the end. The D fought an 80 year old Bird of Prey and both ships were lost, with the D being heavily outgunned by the BoP.”

So, that brings us to why we’re here.

“Why is the Ambassador-class on the front lines again?”

Exactly.

“So, the original Ambassadors ended production in 2378, with both this ship and the Loma Prieta being the last ones off the line. About five years ago, while working on the Odyssey-class project, Commander Ihle borrowed both ships to prototype a number of technologies for the Super Capital Ship project. The reasoning being that (a) the Block-II and IIIIs were designed to have parts easily replaced in case of EPS overload and (b) no one would really care if a couple of Ambys were lost if something went wrong. That’s real high praise, ain’t it?”

So both ships became testbeds?

“Yes. So they redid the deflector arrays to match the upcoming Galaxys, with the Loma Prieta being the last ones off the line. About five years ago, while working on the Odyssey-class project, Commander Ihle borrowed both ships to prototype a number of technologies for the Super Capital Ship project. The reasoning being that (a) the Block-II and IIIIs were designed to have parts easily replaced in case of EPS overload and (b) no one would really care if a couple of Ambys were lost if something went wrong. That’s real high praise, ain’t it?”

With new EPS systems, the Ambassador found herself in a better position. But she was still a very old ship.

“I’ll just use one of Admiral Chekov’s parables to explain: ‘Said the wolf to pup as he was devouring the elderly peasant, ‘sometimes the oldest things are the tastiest!’”

That seems to describe a lot of Ambassador-class fans.

“Including me! So they take the Loma Prieta on her first test as this upgraded version (which we now call the Block-III/A) they get jumped by Orion pirates near Alpha Centauri, so the Prieta is suddenly in a combat situation. Commander Futagami, with little firepower on the ship because they were in the process of upgrading her weapons, finds out that the pirates were flying in a formation that brought them close together roughly every couple of minutes. She has her engineering team turn the deflector up to full power, and with the new EPS systems, it doesn’t overload. The pirates get close to each other and he lets off a deflector burst like the original Ambassador had, and they get sucked into this gravity well. She fires a full spread of the then prototype Neutronic Torpedoes at one of the frigates, which goes up in a warp core breach. Being close to two other ships, that breach triggers breaches in them, and so on until the entire group is destroyed by their own allies’ warp engines!”
I take it that went down well with SCE?

“When Admiral T’Nae heard what her Loma Prieta had done, she contacted Admiral Quinn to investigate a fleet wide reanalysis on the class. And they walked away from it by comparing both the Block-I and the later Block-II and III Ambys and found a refit procedure that gave birth to the production line Block-III/As which launched in late 2409. They found a gorgeous synergy among the variants that these new variants like the Rhea now possess. We’ve got the wonderful experimental technologies and progressive concepts of the prototype, the sturdiness and fast maneuverability of the redesign, and the efficient power systems of the Odysseys. The Ambassador-class is a lesson in design synergy, even if it was an accident."

It sounds like the Ambassador is doing well now.

“Yes and no. The old decommissioned Ambys were refitted to the Block-III/As, but Starfleet Command decided to commission a new ship design based on the original U.S.S. Ambassador. And from that we got the new Guardian-class. But it uses the base space frames of the Block-I Ambys that were put into storage. So sadly, any upgrades that class has, we don’t get. However, they don’t get the sturdiness of the later Ambys versions, so it’s a real trade off.”

Do you think the Rhea will be replaced with a Guardian-class?

“I’ll fight it as long as I can! And most of the other Ambassador-class captains I know will too. These ships got derided for a long time as a nonsense finicky design that doesn’t show the true lineage of Starfleet’s technological advantage. I retort, that the Ambys is proof that the Admiral as way ahead of his time and with the multiple influences of later designers, the Ambassador has a chance to fly again. I know the Admiral would probably consider that an insult since he wasn’t a fan of the redesign, but, you have to admit, these babies were built to last. She’s not as pretty as a Block-I, but she gets the job done, dammit.”

No one is arguing that point.

“Well, someone has to. Whether it’s the condemnation of the Block-II and later hulls, the sneering at the malfunctioning systems of the I, or the overshadowing of the Galaxy over our ships. We, as Captains and crewmen of Ambassador-class ships have had to fight a stigma in Starfleet. The overshadowing of the Enterprise, herself? How could we not wear it as a badge of honor?”

Hard to argue with that logic. So, what is the Ambassador’s current mission profile?

“At the moment, everything. Most of the fleet is still down following the Iconian War, and with hostilities ramping up with other powers in the quadrant, either taking advantage of the ass kicking Starfleet got, or for... other reasons, we’re mostly handling territory patrols. But, the Rhea is scheduled for a special assignment soon in the Alpha Quadrant. Classified, naturally, but it is a front line assignment. We’ll actually be coordinating with the Loma Prieta, the Jupiter, and the Pathfinder on this project.”

Sounds like it’s important.

“It is!”

I do have one more question for you. Do you have any comments on the rumor that the prototype U.S.S. Ambassador and related hull frames not slated for conversion into the Guardian-class have been pulled out of storage and put into line for upgrades to the current top of the line tier of starships?

“I’m sorry. I don’t know what you’re talking about. Check with Utopia Planetia, they currently possess the Ambassador and those space frames.”

Thank you for your time, Captain.

“Any time, I’m a huge fan of Jayce’s. Used to read your work when I was working at Utopia Planetia. The Rhea always has a place for you here.”
The Ambassadors of Beginning Again

A new beginning blooms for the Ambassador-class Support Cruiser. From rough beginnings, through being overshadowed by its older and younger siblings, to a chance to shine again, the Ambassador reflects the true spirit of Starfleet and the Federation. Through tenacity, reliability, and dedication we can overcome all obstacles.

Whatever challenges await Starfleet out there, the Ambassador is ready to stand by and support any and all allies on the field in scientific research, combat, or engineering prowess. With talented captains, quick-witted officers, and a little luck, this 91 year old veteran of Starfleet still has a long career ahead of her.

About this Article & Interview

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