

HOUSE OF IRON

THE HISTORY OF HOUSE ORLOCK

In the first of what will hopefully become a regular series, we take a closer look at House Orlock, the House of Iron. If all goes according to plan, we'll cover the other Hive City Houses over the next few issues of the magazine...

HOUSE RULE

Whilst certainly not the most powerful House in Hive City, House Orlock is without doubt the most populous. The House is comprised of far more families than any of its rivals, and each of those families in turn is much larger. Because of this, the Orlock system of House rule differs somewhat from that handed down from the Spire and (nominally at least) observed by the other houses. Most Houses are ruled by a single ruling family, who invariably take the dynastic name of the house, although often this will be the hereditary name

of the ruling family anyway, since in most houses the leadership has remained unchanged for centuries. Within House Orlock however, the families are far too numerous for this to be effective, and instead loose alliances of families form through pact, bribe, marriage and murder, with each of these groupings dominating as much of the House's resources as their size permits, and dividing it amongst their own members as they wish.

Such a fractious system of rule has in the past led to damaging swings in the balance of power, which often served only to weaken the house further, and alienate friends and allies alike. Aware of this, all the elements of House Orlock have for several generations observed an agreement whereby the Orlock family itself remains permanently as ruling family of the house. Under this system, Lord

Orlock remains permanently the head of the House, though invariably the Orlocks are bound to follow the will of the largest extended family under their rule, anyway. Surprisingly, House Orlock actually remains one of the most unified and disciplined Houses in the Hive, with their apparently riven system of leadership experiencing remarkably few schisms.

RELATIONS

House Orlock, largely due to its immense population, is the only Hive city House to share borders with all the other Houses (though in the case of the Delaques, the border consists only of a single mile long



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dump). Perhaps because of this, Orlocks are seen as reliable trading partners, on stable (if not good) terms with most other houses in hive city. Likewise, they have successfully acquired contracts from almost all the noble houses at one time or another. Orlock blood is present in most of the other Houses, a fact attributed the Orlock's particular penchant for settling disputes by means of political marriages and accompanying concessions and compromise. Perhaps the most notable example of this is the current Lady Ko'Iron, born Brassis Diene Orlock, daughter of the then Lord Hagen Orlock.

Orlocks, then, for the most part share good relations with the other Houses, having few serious rivalries other than the long running feud with the Delaque. In the past, House Orlock's strongest alliances have typically been with House Escher and House Van Saar. The leadership of House Escher suspend their normal dismissive arrogance when dealing with Orlock for, while they still see the men of the house as piteous and disadvantaged, they respect the prominent position of many fellow females within House Orlock. The aforementioned marriages of convenience for which Orlock has famed has led to particularly cunning Orlock women holding the balance of power on many occasions – a fact which the Escher view with haughty satisfaction.

House Orlock's mutual respect of House Van Saar stems from centuries of shared resources. The immense manufacturing and particularly iron-smelting capability of the Orlocks makes them useful allies of the Van Saar, whose own workshops produce the very most fine and intricate goods, but lack many of the basic materials required.

Amongst this atmosphere of otherwise stable relations, one rivalry that stands out like a sore thumb is the seemingly unending dispute between House Orlock and the Delaques. In their bid to acquire the Ulant contract, House Orlock employed dozens of Underhive gangs to sabotage Delaque mining and supply operations, utterly disgracing the Delaques in the eyes of House Ulant who promptly awarded the contract to House Orlock instead.

From there the feud escalated as the Delaques blockaded supply lines, transport routes and mine entrances around their previous contract zone. Many of the resources they had harvested during their fulfilment of the Ulant contract actually belonged to the Ulant's themselves, leased to the operators of various trade contracts, but the Delaque's now seized them as their own, refusing to turn them over to the Orlocks. Iron and most other metals and minerals were no problem for the Orlocks, who simply switched production to their own

THE LOST HOUSE

Almost all the Houses of Hive Primus have within their traditions a collection of myths and legends pertaining to their founding, or their rise to dominance within the Hive. Some claim themselves to be the original inhabitants of Necromunda (and hence the eldest house), while others share various myths about their arrival on the planet, their settling of the hive, their founding by a particularly powerful individual or their emergence from other, long forgotten hierarchies. In truth, the origins of the Houses are impossible to fathom with so little reliable information describing the long millennia since mankind first came to Necromunda. There is no doubt that Houses have emerged, risen and fallen over the centuries, though any claiming to know the true nature of such dynastic evolutions are either liars or overconfident fools.

House Aranthus, for instance, once ruled over substantial portions of Hive City, but vanished entirely several centuries ago when an unstoppable

plague swept through their population and decimated their numbers (thought by many to be the same plague whose after effects left the males of House Escher such physical derelicts). The remaining Housemembers struggled on, but rapidly found themselves so vulnerable to attacks of all kinds, and so under resourced that their spiralling debt led to the dissolution of all their territories and assets by Lord Helmaur himself. Those few remaining Aranthus' variously dispersed to other Hives, or were absorbed into other houses by means of marriage, sanctuary and serfdom. In the centuries after their demise, House Aranthus entered legend and came to be known as the Lost House. Since that time, and right up to the present, it has remained fashionable for individuals to claim lineage from the House, many seeing it as a badge of uniqueness and distinction. The claim is a particularly popular one amongst bounty hunters, and members of the Noble Houses, many of whom venture to the ancient haunts of House Aranthus in search of fabled remnants of the past like some kind of pilgrimage.

existing pits, factories and forges. Many of the fuels required for manufacturing las-cells, however, proved scarce with the Delaque blockade still in place, and forced the Lord Orlock of the time, Ammonus II, to take rather more direct action.

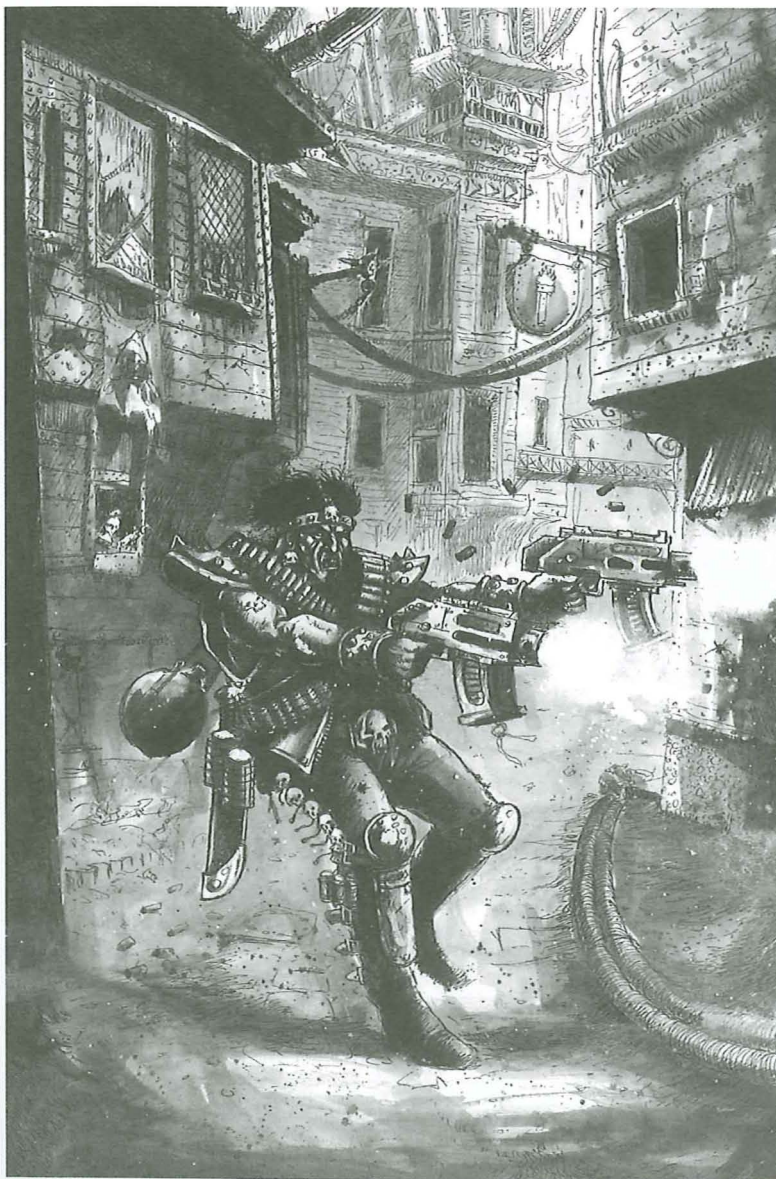
First blood was spilled at Drypus falls, a vast boiling confluence of dozens of hideous chemical rivers where broad steel pans strewn across the ceiling catch the steaming chemical clouds and allow them to collect in droplets from where they are siphoned off and pumped throughout the hive as valuable liquid fuels.

A dozen or more Orlock gangs, led in person by Ammonus' youngest son, Kagill, descended upon Drypus, attempting to seize the chemical wealth that lay there. The Delaques were outnumbered, completely taken aback by such a blatant display of hostility in what until that point had been a war of secrets. Sensing that no

victory was possible, the Delaques instead planted charges and ignited the chemical rivers that fed into Drypus, blasting very canyon it formed into pieces. Dozens of Orlocks, and many of the Delaques too slow to escape, were killed – only Kagill Orlock and a handful of his compatriots escaped, most with considerable injuries.

While the Underhive frequently verges on lawlessness, such open warfare between the Houses could not be permitted, and the attention of the noble houses was quickly drawn to the mounting feud after the events of Drypus. Lord Arius Helmawr himself was forced to intervene, and with the Delaques clearly the guilty party on this occasion, he had very few options open to him. This, however, proved to be exactly the opportunity Helmawr needed...

The Delaques had long been known associates of Helmawr and a number of the other Noble houses, though Helmawr had long feared that the connection between the houses was too apparent, and was actually stymieing the spies and informants of House Delaque. In Drypus, Helmawr had a perfect opportunity to reconstruct his relationship with the house. Openly, Helmawr was forced to rule that the Delaque's actions were unacceptable and voided all contracts with them. Privately, to avoid Delaque enmity and permanently indebt them to him, Helmawr assured them that they would henceforth be handsomely rewarded for their work as his eyes and ears throughout the hive on condition they never openly disclose any such arrangement. In a gesture of allegiance, Helmawr accused House Orlock of failing to keep their gang elements in check and forced Lord Ammonus Orlock to outlaw his own son for the attack on Drypus. Ammonus protested, but Helmawr threatened the loss of the Ulant contract and Kagill was cast out into exile.



The bitter hatred between Delaque and Orlock never abated from that day forward and though open warfare ceased, countless acts of sabotage, slander and violent rivalry remain the only dealings between the two.

A century after Drypus, Lord Balen Orlock's accession was marred by persistent rumours of illegitimacy, that he had been fathered by a Goliath, or that he otherwise lacked Orlock blood. Though none of the accusations were ever proven, such allegations invariably stick and Balen's reign failed utterly as his credibility collapsed. He died a broken and discredited man.

More recently, less than a hundred years before the birth of the current Lord Helmawr, fifteen prominent Orlock Paters were convicted in the Guilder courts and sent to penal colonies. Their crimes varied, but all centred around a case made by the guilders that the Orlocks had been stealing from cargos they should have been protecting. The Orlocks insisted that the lost cargoes had been as a result of ambushes made against them by the Delaques, but the Guilders claimed no proof of this could be found and prosecuted many of the Orlock leaders. For several decades afterwards the Orlocks remained impoverished due to the resultant lack of Guilder allies.

Just five years ago, the Delaques assassinated Lord Hagen Orlock, throwing the House into confusion and elevating the tensions between the two immeasurably.



TIES TO THE UNDERHIVE

Perhaps because of their immense population, the Orlocks are most notable in the underhive for the far reaching activity of their 'families'. Where other gangs are formed simply of a discordant collection of the unfortunate, miscreant and aimless, Orlocks gang are typically formed as extensions of the ruthless, well organised cartels, rackets and other dubious interests which the Orlocks maintain in the underhive. Orlock gangs are almost always familial affairs, and as such their membership is not simply limited to the disgruntled youth found in other houses. For this reason, Orlock gangs tend to include a far broader range of ages than might be typical in the underhive. This blood inclusion, inevitably, also extends to women, who likewise appear far more frequently in Orlock gangs than in the gangs of most other houses (Escher, obviously, excepted).

This organised gang activity also makes the Orlocks a common sight around many underhive settlements. Orlocks will be found running saloons, gambling dens and other shady businesses where their housefolk will congregate away from the rather more dangerous wilds of the underhive. Orlock gangs then venture out of these settlements, often with the aim of protecting interests of their family's businesses. This high level of organisation is a rather marked contrast to many gangs who simply choose the underhive way of life out of some unbridled desire for violence.

Orlock gangs act in unison with one another far more commonly than most houses, though perhaps because of this the reverse is also true. Internal strife between rival Orlock families and their gang elements is both more common and more bloody than in most other houses. This is only exacerbated by the Orlock system of government, where the political vying for House control in Hive City spills over into actual violence in the lawless underhive.

