

# Crimes Against History

## Living Memory

Births, Deaths and Revolutions

### 1,202 years ago

One of the more notable (if unpolitical) Houses produces a new clutch of offspring, as per schedule. But for reasons which remain vague, probably involving impurities in the birthing system, the newborns are less than perfect. At least one of them bears the first sign of the insanity which will plague the House in years to come, while another is destined to become the greatest dissident the House, and possibly the Homeworld, has ever produced. Furthermore, as history will shortly reveal, this House isn't alone. House Dvora - one of the Houses closest to the Presidency - also notes irregularities in its breeding-engines, but as an elite bloodline its internal affairs are shrouded in polite secrecy.

Until now, almost nothing has changed in ten-million years... so the trouble with the birthing process must seem like a particularly bad omen, at least for those who actually notice it. In fact, it's quite possible that the flaw in the House's bloodline is never corrected simply because it's considered unthinkable that serious errors might occur. The Houses have been ignoring the problems of the outside universe for aeons, believing themselves both secure and superior, so they've had a lot of practice when it comes to overlooking things.

### 920 years ago

Details of this period are sketchy, and as a result there's very little background to what happens next. However, a rough outline of events might run as follows:

The period which later becomes known as the Emperor Era begins, as one of the newer-blooded members of House Dvora ascends to lead the Presidency. What's perhaps most surprising is that he manages to gain so much ground in the politics of the Homeworld despite an obvious lack of decorum: indeed, he could even be described as ambitious, in a world where ambition is theoretically unknown (again, it may well be the ruling Houses' unfamiliarity with ambition which blinds them to it). The new Presidential head takes an unusual interest in the rest of the Spiral Politic, though at the time of his ascendancy none of the other Houses see any reason to be concerned by this.

Yet behind closed doors, the new nominal head of the Homeworld has already formed the Order of the Weal, the Homeworld's first (and only) true counter-intelligence service. He seems to be expecting some form of trouble from the universe outside the Homeworld, and also perceives a threat from the "quiet megalomania" of the Houses on the Homeworld itself. In this he's either prescient or paranoid. Most of the ruling elite, of course, don't even notice that anything's changed.

So when the new Presidency suddenly revolts against the protocols of the Homeworld, and claims that the ruling Houses can only fulfil their potential by involving themselves in the affairs of the Spiral Politic, most of the ruling Houses are taken entirely by surprise. The Homeworld remains unaware of

the politics behind all this: the Order of the Weal has identified its own founder as the real threat to the Homeworld's security, and exposed the head of the Presidency, forcing him to show his hand and begin what can only be described as a crusade against the outside universe. This new militaristic policy is utterly inconceivable to the rest of the Homeworld. The former leader of House society rapidly builds an army (largely picked from the ranks of the lesser species), leaves the protection of the Great Houses, and begins cutting a swathe of blood and burning history across the Spiral Politic... his goal apparently being to build himself an empire which spans the continuum and bends causality to his own will. He is, in a word, mad.

To say that this is remarkable would be an immense understatement. Nobody is capable of explaining how such an aberration could occur, although there's suspicion (never proved) that some form of outside infiltration might have been responsible. Those who've noticed the recent glitches" in the Houses' reproductive systems begin to take a different view. The suggestion is made, though never put before the elite, that the Homeworld is suffering a kind of retro-shock: if the speculation is true, then something very bad indeed is due to happen to the world in the future - perhaps only centuries in the future - and the Houses, being time-sensitive, are feeling the effects in advance. This might explain the madness of the Emperor Presidency, which does after all have access to the psychopredictive methods used by the ruling Houses to monitor the outside universe. Certainly, the pronouncements of this Emperor do seem to suggest that he's building an army to fight an enemy which only he can see.

(Predictive technology is never used to divine the future of the Homeworld itself, and according to the ten-million-year-old protocols it's theoretically impossible for an agent of the Houses to meet anybody from the Houses' own future... whether this is a law of nature or a rule laid down by the forefathers is difficult to establish, but as the forefathers defined much of known science it's possible that both are true.)

## 916 years ago

The Emperor's forces lay waste to over a dozen worlds in the outside universe before the ruling Houses can stop him. Technically the technology exists to find and recall him in an instant, but the rebellion has caused such a shock to the status quo that it takes the Houses some time just to decide on a course of action: they have no understanding of the term rapid response, and no idea how to deal with a crisis originating in their own ranks. This becomes obvious when the Emperor is finally returned to the Homeworld, and the Great Houses set a new precedent by having him executed, an act which inadvertently reminds the entire culture of its mortal, fleshy roots. For a hierarchy which thinks of itself as "eternal" and can only survive in stasis, this is not a good move. A new head of the Presidency is hurriedly installed before anybody can start to question the Houses' competence.

The Emperor Presidency is the first serious disturbance to the Homeworld in nearly ten-million years, but it's only the start. In the wake of the affair, the ruling Houses re-open one of their ancient prison facilities - a minor world in an envelope outside normal-time - to deal with any such uprisings in future... but in years to come the mandate of this prison is to be widened, and it'll be used to incarcerate members of any species judged by the Houses to have committed offences against history. Or even those who simply threaten the Houses' position.

More importantly, the Emperor Presidency has destroyed the wall of polite secrecy which has traditionally separated the Houses from the lesser species. In the past the Homeworld has watched the rest of the Spiral Politic from a distance, unnoticed and unapproachable, but in the wake of the Emperor's crusade many cultures in the outside universe have become shockingly aware of the

Houses' existence. And naturally, many of these cultures feel more than a little threatened now they know they're under scrutiny. Though none of the lesser species even come close to matching the technological expertise of the Houses, several societies begin to take up arms, just in case they ever get a chance to take on these distant gods of the Homeworld.

## **c. 750 years ago**

Society on the Homeworld remains more or less stable at this point, although there are increasing numbers of renegades and runaways, suggesting that cracks are appearing in the hierarchy. Several timeships have simply vanished from the world, not to mention various (almost fetishistic) relics of the pre-time-travel era. For the first time, the ruling Houses openly acknowledge that some intervention in history may be necessary, and the fact that the archons have been imprisoning selected individuals from the outside universe becomes public knowledge.

On the Homeworld this leads to the formation of a social movement which believes in the direct manipulation of outside affairs, something which is (officially) anathema to the ruling elite, who insist that imprisonments are only carried out when absolutely necessary. In truth there's been an interventionist faction on the Homeworld since time immemorial, largely fuelled by the bloodlines which organised the Yssgaroth war, but only now does the idea spread to the rest of the populace. When the ruling Houses act to prevent one of the lesser species gaining time-technology of their own, the interventionists seem entirely vindicated. Previously the Homeworld has only intervened when another species threatens history, but now the Council seems prepared to stop anybody even getting the chance to try.

Apart from the Emperor Presidency, this is the first time anybody can remember seeing what might be called a protest movement" on the Homeworld. Thinkers continue to suggest that something is causing these disturbances to society, disturbances which will only increase as the Houses approach their "judgement day".

## **454 years ago**

The covert interventionists have by this point attained so much power, including the infiltration of the Presidency, that they can begin a far more direct intervention in historical affairs than has ever been thought possible. The ruling Houses are repeatedly forced to approve of interventionist action, just in order to prevent a major political schism. Fear of another Emperor Presidency has been guiding their actions for over three-hundred years now, and its elderly members have finally reached the point where they're prepared to consider the genocide of lesser species rather than face a civil war.

Naturally, this sort of attitude is in complete breach of the official protocols. Civil unrest grows, as members of even the lowliest Houses realise that the political landscape has changed. The Order of the Weal struggles to hold back the intervention movement, believing it to be the greatest current threat to House society, but the organisation's far too small to fight the interventionists on all fronts. After aeons of self-imposed stasis, this is merely the prelude to the cultural revolution ahead.

## **453 years ago**

There's a scandal on the Homeworld when a member of one of the Houses - one of the first broken"

offspring of the faulty breeding programme, from a bloodline which was once one of the five leading Houses but has since become infamous for its somewhat eccentric membership - finally questions the protocols in public, and begins speaking out in favour of a more dynamic, adaptable model of history. The underlying idea seems to be that change for its own sake is a worthwhile goal. The suggestions made are beyond even the worst excesses of the interventionists, almost as if this "protestor" is deliberately goading the more reactionary elements among the ruling Houses. Yet rather than wanting to resist/ control the outside universe, this new renegade seems to want to embrace certain principles of the lesser species, possibly even learning a thing or two from the organic reproduction of the other cultures.

For the most part the Great Houses find this utterly appalling, and the rebel finally breaks away to found a brand new House, the first new bloodline founded since the early days of time-active civilisation. The name chosen for this new line is House Paradox, an obvious slap-in-the-face as conventional thinking states that paradox is the worst possible thing a time-active culture can create. As the founder of the House, the rebel takes on the traditional title "Grandfather", and the ruling Houses are horrified to learn that there's actually nothing in the protocols to stop this sort of thing.

However, when House Paradox (such as it is) begins openly experimenting with non-linear time systems the Presidency has an excuse to crack down. The defining moment comes when the Grandfather is ordered to appear before an Audience of the ruling Houses, and arrives before the seat of the Presidency dressed in a tailored, polished skeleton, worn as if it were ceremonial armour. The bones of the suit are the bones of a creature half-hominid, half-bestial... the bones of the Houses' own kind, but as they would look if the war against the Yssgaroth had been lost instead of won. Even the Grandfather's attire is in breach of the protocols, fashioned from materials which simply shouldn't exist in this timeline, in itself a message (and an implied threat?) to the leading Houses.

Presented with this act of defiance - and used to aeons of subservience - the ruling Houses are unsure how to react, and prove themselves to be impotent in the face of the crisis. With the authorities in disarray the Grandfather simply walks free. As the old Presidency faces calls for a new leadership, House Paradox prepares to gain followers.

## **452 years ago**

The unrest reaches a head when the leader of the Presidency is assassinated after only four-hundred years of service. It later transpires that the assassin is merely a deranged renegade, apparently unconnected to any interventionist faction... but the fact that the idea of a deranged renegade is no longer shocking is significant in itself. The assassin is believed dead, though nobody can say for certain whether it was suicide or a covert execution.

The long process of electing a new Presidency begins. The process is always a slow one, lasting months at best and years at worst, but this time the archons are quite specifically in no hurry. The Homeworld is considered to be facing the greatest cultural crisis in its long history, and nobody wants the responsibility of backing a new leader. With society already shaken, a wrong decision could prove calamitous. As history is about to show.

## **447 years ago**

A new head of the Presidency is elected, the Great Houses choosing a candidate whom they hope will

be able to reach a compromise between the reactionary Houses and the new dissenters, a candidate known for his personal interest in the kind of unusual“ time-theory which is currently in so much dispute (it's a general rule that the nominal head of House society has to have an instinct for the temporal sciences, for fairly obvious reasons). But the new head - the 406th individual to hold the title - proves to be less than stable, sparking fears of another Imperator. His researches into the early history of the universe lead him to conclude that the cosmos is being threatened by formless horrors from the dawn of time, and this unfortunately leads him to become perilously close to the Paradox apologists. The ruling Houses spend a great deal of time spreading stories about how sane and wise the new head is, but the elite are hardly as credible as they used to be.” It's now generally acknowledged that the problems with the Houses' reproductive systems are affecting every strata of society. Well, of course.

## 446 years ago

Eleven days of localised history are removed from the timeline of eighteenth century Earth by House Paradox, and stored in a small bubble outside the normal mass of the Spiral Politic. This tiny Eleven-Day universe is kept by the Grandfather as a form of safehouse“, and it's suspected that the entire manoeuvre is orchestrated with the covert knowledge of the (corrupted) head of the Presidency. Given his own “awkward” interests and researches, he must surely have noticed it.

Over the following years the Eleven-Day Empire will remain largely unoccupied, with any of the House's followers found there being in transit, using the time-bubble as a forward base for their own researches in the outside universe.

## 444 years ago

The 406th head of the Presidency commits suicide only three years into his term of office (a record, in a society where Presidencies can potentially last for millennia), believing that there's no escape from the formless horrors which will one day return to haunt the universe. He spends his last days spreading peculiar stories and insulting the rest of the Houses.

In truth, his attempts to probe the further reaches of history have led him to experience premonitions of the Homeworld's fate. In his more lucid (final) moments, he comes to realise that the Great Houses are soon to be plunged into a war so utterly catastrophic that it'll make the conflict with the Yssgaroth look like a border skirmish... a war in which the enemy remains unseen and unknown, despite his ramblings.

In his wake, the scientific researches of the 406th Presidency are declared arcane” and promptly outlawed. But they've already had an impact on the Homeworld's psyche. Rumours of impending catastrophe are once again spreading throughout the Houses, and there are suggestions that the “centralised” policy of the Homeworld might need to be changed... why, a few of the Houses argue, should we be a sitting target by concentrating ourselves on a single world? Why remain here, if we won't be secure forever?

It later transpires that the late head of House society also had these thoughts, and covertly made plans for the creation of a whole series of new colony-worlds, breaking the tradition of the Homeworld being a unique vantage-point over the rest of time. Nobody among the ruling Houses, however, is currently prepared to act on such plans.

## 443 years ago

Ever since the Emperor Presidency, the threat of hostile action from the lesser species has been a constant, lurking fear in the psyche of the Homeworld. However, despite the fact that many minor powers are still busy arming themselves for any (potential) future conflict, rationally speaking the Houses are convinced that there's no immediate threat to themselves or their powerbase.

It's something of a body-blow, then, when a hostile force actually manages to set foot on the Homeworld. That any species could access the separate time-frame of the Homeworld is remarkable enough, but what's alarming is that the Houses' own military guard - in existence since the founding of the Houses, but until now used almost exclusively for ceremonial purposes - proves to be laughably ill-equipped to deal with enemy forces in face-to-face combat. Fortunately for the Houses, the invaders have very little in their favour apart from their ability to punch their way into the Homeworld's territories, and the hostile units are eventually dispatched by time-active weaponry.

It's yet another affront to the Homeworld's dignity. Worse still, during the crisis several elder members of the Houses flee the comforts of civilised society and briefly seek sanctuary outside the Homeworld's capital, in the non-technological wilderness which polite society usually fails to even acknowledge. The cultural impact of this, as some of the leading lights of the Great Houses are forced to get back to nature, will be immense.

The Grandfather of House Paradox is, as ever, on hand to crow over the wreckage.

## 442 years ago

The result of these sundry crises - incompetent Presidencies, rampant interventionists and off-world invaders - is the schism feared for so long by the ruling Houses, a situation only worsened by the House Paradox controversy. Luckily, the result is a civil dispute rather than a full-scale conflict. A rival Presidency breaks away from the Homeworld and establishes itself in normal-time, on the medium-technology world of Dronid, where it attempts to use members of the lesser species as a kind of menial class. This flawed attempt at a New Homeworld soon falters, mostly because the rebels don't really have the first idea how the outside universe works, but nonetheless fragments of the Houses' time-technology will litter Dronid for years to come. And for the first time since the Emperor, the Great Houses have become directly involved in the politics of the outside universe.

As the ruling Houses pull themselves back together, the decision is finally made to crack down on the errant Grandfather, the authorities claiming that the Dronid incident has shown the need for more rigid controls on time-theory. The head of House Paradox is tried and imprisoned for life on the prison-world, in perpetual suspension. And as the prison-world exists outside of normal time it's anticipated that the Houses will hear no more about the matter...

## c. 430 years ago

Always prescient when it comes to the politics of the outside universe, the Order of the Weal has been conducting certain investigations of its own, and has reached the conclusion that the predictions of the 406th Presidency might not have been insane as society likes to think. It thus becomes the first group on the Homeworld to acknowledge that a future War in Heaven is inevitable, and to begin making plans for the oncoming apocalypse.

Yet this new obsession has left the Order neglecting affairs on the Homeworld. The truth is that history is passing its agents by. Ultimately the Order disintegrates, a victim of House politics, unable to compete with more modern groups like the interventions and the followers of House Paradox. As it's still technically a secret counter-intelligence service, the Homeworld fails to notice its passing, and its conclusions about the War are either lost or ignored.

It'll be some years yet before the Houses will have to confront what the Order has already deduced.

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