

THE TALE OF KAL JERICO

Gather round you ungrateful juves and listen up. This here is the tale of the greatest Bounty Hunter ever to walk the wastes of Necromunda. This is the tale of the man - nay, the legend - Kal Jerico.

I met Kal when we were both young fools; me a destitute half-ratskin living rough in Dust Falls and him a newly minted Bounty Hunter with something to prove. Back then I didn't ask a whole lot of questions about why someone so self-assured and fancy-dressed as Kal would team up with a scummer like me. I think all those years ago Kal saw something in me I hadn't even seen in myself, or maybe he was just in a hurry and I was lying in the right drinking-hole doorway at the right time. Either way, he was looking for a hired gun to watch his back and I was in dire need of a few extra creds. Of course I don't imagine the story of how I met Kal is what you came over to hear. I can tell you what I know more about Kal, so let me tell you what I know...

AUSPICIOUS BEGINNINGS

From what I've pieced together over the years, Kal was a spire orphan – given to the Pale Sisters by his mother, or perhaps someone who knew his mother, and left with nothing more than a name. Whether his name came from his mother, he never said, though I always suspected he chose the Jerico part himself. Or was it Jericho? Some people can't seem to agree and given Kal's handwriting I've never been able to tell. Still you can't feel that sad for another spire brat, just because his family didn't want to give him their name. Kal, as I understand it, was one of these good-looking, talented-at-everything, confident youths right from the start – so it was no wonder he regularly got a kicking from his 'peers'. 'Character building' I think he used to call it. It wasn't just his easy good looks and natural coordination that made him stand apart from the others. He had something else, something that allowed him to outlive many of his fellow orphans and eventually escape the Pale Sisters and a life as some noble's valet: he was fantastically lucky.

As an example of that luck, he once told me about the time he ran with the Spire Harriers. Like a lot of those taken in by the Pale Sisters he'd sneak out

during night cycle and get up to no good. It was only a matter of time before he fell in with one of the spire's Brat gangs – in this case the Spire Harriers, a group of angry young mid-hive wannabes looking for a fight. As Kal tells it the Harriers were raiding this Militarum supply depot full of weapons and wargear destined for the Imperial Guard. Anyway, while the rest of the gang were rooting around in the loot and setting off the alarms, Kal had found some officer's personal kit and was busy trying on a storm coat and examining a pair of fancy laspistols. When the Palanites burst in and gunned down the Harriers, somehow Kal was lucky enough to be out of sight. Unfortunately for Kal the Enforcers were covering the only exit, so wearing his new coat and guns he walked out into the open and managed to convince them he was an Imperial officer. He then promptly thanked them for their service and marched right out the front door!

Apparently this was how Kal got his distinctive attire, though I've heard him tell it other ways too, so it might all just be swagger. For all I know Kal found everything he owns on some bounty hunter's corpse the first time he came down into the Underhive and the rest is all just lies to make himself sound fancier. Kal also already had his Guild Sanctioning Writ when I first met him and while I've seen it honoured many times with scrip from guild coffers for bounties filled, he never told me how he came by it.

HIGH TIMES IN THE UNDERHIVE

Over the years, countless folks have taken a dislike to me on account of my face and my parentage, though I've never met anyone with a talent for making enemies like Kal Jerico. I wouldn't say Kal betrays other bounty hunters, rips off the guilders or kills the wrong people any more than most bounty hunters; it's just that he makes a bit of a song and dance about it when he does. So people tend to remember it. And then want to stick sharp pointy things into his pretty face. Take Yolanda for



instance. Tracking her down was one of our first jobs, and it was Kal who figured out she wasn't Outland Annie of the Wildcats but a runaway member of House Catallus. Now anyone else might have put a round in her head or shipped her back uphive when they found her, but not Kal. He did the gentlemanly thing and left her tied up in a sewer instead. Of course she escaped, came back to kill him and then, because it's Kal, ended up teaming up with him more than once... though she did try to kill him again a few times.

Then there are the real enemies, people like Nemo the Faceless or Cardinal Crimson, the Pit Slave Vandal Feg or the Slaver Ludd. Some like Vandal showed up again and again, no matter how many times Kal 'killed' them, while others like

Nemo seemed to know more about what Kal was up to than Kal himself. Which of course makes me believe Nemo never really had it in for Kal at all, he just wanted to use him to further his own agendas. The creepiest of the lot though has to be Cardinal Crimson, who started out as one of those Redemptionist nutters, fell in some toxic waste and got transformed into some kind of skinless horror before getting infested with sump spiders and worshipping some gigantic arachnid as the God-Emperor personified. That last one really freaked me out...

Of course, Kal takes all this kind of thing in his stride. Sometimes I think the charmed life he leads is because he genuinely believes nothing can touch him – at least I've never seen him so much as flinch



when another horror from his past rears up, intent on turning him into a bloodstain. Even when the floor falls out beneath our feet, I crawl out covered in gunk while somehow Kal is already standing there without so much as one of his braids out of place. Then again, I wouldn't trade all the creds in Hive City to see some of the things Kal's seen.

It was around the third time we tangled with Cardinal Crimson that Kal started getting secretive... well, more secretive than normal. And I wasn't surprised when one day he just disappeared – Kal being notoriously self-centred when it comes to thinking about the feelings of those around him. Later on I found out through Yolanda that he'd gone up-hive, and according to her contacts he'd met up with a bunch of off-worlders and left the planet.

KAL JERICO RETURNS

Kal never told me exactly where he'd been when he left Necromunda (if he did at all) and I didn't ask too many questions; my own father, that being the ratskin half of my heritage, reminded me to keep my eyes firmly focused on the ground. That way if the sky ever falls on your head, at least you won't see it coming. All I did pick up from Kal was that it had something to do with his mother, though he made it clear I wasn't supposed to inquire about her or what she did for a living. Kal brought back more than just a smug sense of entitlement from his trip – though now I think about it he probably already had that. This was when Wotan showed up, Kal's trusty cyber-mastiff. That canid sure was loyal to Kal, though it rankled a bit that he started treating it better than he ever did me. I mean, what does a robot canine need with a pat on the head... especially when there are people with real feelings standing right there!

In any case, as it transpired, not long after Kal returned, his past came back to haunt him again. This time it was House Helmawr. As if Kal didn't have enough powerful enemies he had to draw the attention of the Lord of Necromunda himself. If I'd known just what kind of trouble working with Kal entailed I might have pretended a bit harder to be asleep when he first found me in that doorway...

Now it's at this point I should debunk some of the rumours about Kal being next in line to the title of Lord of Necromunda and command of the Imperial House. He's not next in line, it's more like 50th. As it transpired, at least according to Kal – though Yolanda did back him up, which gives it a bit more credence – he is one of Gerontius' bastards, one of over 200 depending on who you talk to. So when 'dad' called, Kal answered and dragged us all into a whole mess of family squabbles. There was his homicidal half-brother, more murderous spyrers than I care to remember and a wedding. Did I mention Yolanda was also in line to inherit control

of House Catallus? You'd think running with a couple of genuine heirs apparent would afford me some privileges; of course, here I am still buying my own bottles of Wild Snake.

Coming from the Helmawr line does explain a lot about Kal Jerico though. You don't just learn to be that arrogant; it's something you have to be born with. For some reason Kal has an aversion to his noble heritage and despite saving old Gerontius' life he didn't stick around in the spire, because it seems that no matter how high Kal climbs or the friends he makes he somehow always ends up back in the Underhive.

DARK DAYS AHEAD

No sooner had Kal gotten back to Hagen's Hole than we got ourselves embroiled in another adventure. This time it had to do with the old story of the corpse hive – you know, that one where all the people ate each other or turned into plague zombies? Well it seems like there was a wanderer from the wastes who was claiming to be a survivor of the corpse hive and this guy started stirring up the helot workers and the corpse grinders. Understandably the guilders got nervous, there being talk about how such and such had happened before and how so and so was a sign of the apocalypse. Anyway, this time round we teamed up with some newcomers.

There were the two Yolandas – Catallus and Skorn. I only made a joke about them both having the same name once, there being something extremely bowel-loosening about the hard stares they both gave me when I did. Yolanda, my Yolanda, has explicitly forbidden me calling her 'Lady Jerico' on pain of a long walk off the Dust Falls docks. Then there was the ex-Escher Bounty Hunter Belladonna who took great offense when Kal kept calling her 'Mad' Donna; apparently, being mistaken for an insane murderess from one of the Noble Houses is not alright.

There was also this dwarf and this goat-man, but Kal didn't believe me when I said they wanted to join our band, something about them all getting eaten by space monsters. Kal also proved how connected he was by calling in a favour from Slate Merdena, the famous Orlock hard man. Turns out when we took out old Svend all those years back we really helped out House Orlock, and Slate was more than happy to honour the debt. So there we were; a band of Venators led by the greatest bounty hunter to ever live, the Primus Corpse Grinders getting that mad glint in their eye they get when they've been sampling the raw material again, all ready to save Necromunda from its most extreme threat since the fall of Secundus. But as it's almost time for the last night cycle and my old bones are telling me an ash storm is on the way, I'm afraid that'll have to be a tale for another time...