



NECROMUNDA

UNDERHIVE

RETRIBUTION

JONATHON GREEN



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A NECROMUNDA SHORT STORY

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IN ORDER TO EVEN BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THE BLASTED WORLD OF NECROMUNDA YOU MUST FIRST UNDERSTAND THE HIVE CITIES. THESE MAN-MADE MOUNTAINS OF PLASTEEL, CERAMITE AND ROCKCRETE HAVE ACCRETED OVER CENTURIES TO PROTECT THEIR INHABITANTS FROM A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT, SO VERY MUCH LIKE THE TERMITE MOUNDS THEY RESEMBLE. THE NECROMUNDAN HIVE CITIES HAVE POPULATIONS IN THE BILLIONS AND ARE INTENSELY INDUSTRIALISED, EACH ONE COMMANDING THE MANUFACTURING POTENTIAL OF AN ENTIRE PLANET OR COLONY SYSTEM COMPACTED INTO A FEW HUNDRED SQUARE KILOMETRES.

THE INTERNAL STRATIFICATION OF THE HIVE CITIES IS ALSO ILLUMINATING TO OBSERVE. THE ENTIRE HIVE STRUCTURE REPLICATES THE SOCIAL STATUS OF ITS INHABITANTS IN A VERTICAL PLANE. AT THE TOP ARE THE NOBILITY, BELOW THEM ARE THE WORKERS, AND BELOW THE WORKERS ARE THE DREGS OF SOCIETY, THE OUTCASTS. HIVE PRIMUS, SEAT OF THE PLANETARY GOVERNOR LORD HELMAWR OF NECROMUNDA, ILLUSTRATES THIS IN THE STARKEST TERMS. THE NOBLES -HOUSES HELMAWR, CATTALUS, TY, ULANTI, GREIM, RAN LO AND KO'IRON -LIVE IN THE 'SPIRE', AND SELDOM SET FOOT BELOW THE 'WALL' THAT EXISTS BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE GREAT FORGES AND HAB ZONES OF THE HIVE CITY PROPER.

BELOW THE HIVE CITY IS THE 'UNDERHIVE', FOUNDATION LAYERS OF HABITATION DOMES, INDUSTRIAL ZONES AND TUNNELS WHICH HAVE BEEN ABANDONED IN PRIOR GENERATIONS, ONLY TO BE RE-OCCUPIED BY THOSE WITH NOWHERE ELSE TO GO.

BUT... HUMANS ARE NOT INSECTS. THEY DO NOT HIVE TOGETHER WELL. NECESSITY MAY FORCE IT. BUT THE HIVE CITIES OF NECROMUNDA REMAIN INTERNALLY DIVIDED TO THE POINT OF BRUTALISATION AND OUTRIGHT VIOLENCE BEING AN EVERYDAY FACT OF LIFE. THE UNDERHIVE, MEANWHILE, IS A THOROUGHLY LAWLESS PLACE, BESET BY GANGS AND RENEGADES, WHERE ONLY THE STRONGEST OR THE MOST CUNNING SURVIVE. THE GOLIATHS, WHO BELIEVE FIRMLY THAT MIGHT IS RIGHT; THE MATRIARCHAL, MAN-HATING ESCHER; THE INDUSTRIAL ORLOCKS; THE TECHNOLOGICALLY-MINDED VAN SAAR; THE DELAQUE WHOSE VERY EXISTENCE DEPENDS ON THEIR ESPIONAGE NETWORK; THE FIREY ZEALOTS OF

THE CAWDOR. ALL STRIVING FOR THE ADVANTAGE THAT WILL ELEVATE THEM, NO MATTER HOW BRIEFLY, ABOVE THE OTHER HOUSES AND GANGS OF THE UNDERHIVE.

MOST FASCINATING OF ALL IS WHEN INDIVIDUALS ATTEMPT TO CROSS THE MONUMENTAL PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL DIVIDES OF THE HIVE TO START NEW LIVES. GIVEN SOCIAL CONDITIONS, ASCENSION THROUGH THE HIVE IS NIGH ON IMPOSSIBLE, BUT DESCENT IS AN ALTOGETHER EASIER, ALBEIT ALTOGETHER LESS APPEALING, POSSIBILITY.

*EXCERPTED FROM XONARIARIUS THE YOUNGER'S NOBILITE PAX IMPERATOR
- THE TRIUMPH OF ARISTOCRACY OVER DEMOCRACY.*

The settlement of Lucky Break burned. Crimson and vermilion flames rose high into the still air of the dome. Above the burning holestead lights flickered, through the smoke, against the ceiling of the dome in a myriad constellations, looking so much like the night sky that untold millions inhabiting the mighty mountain city of Hive Primus would never see. Figures moved amidst the flames, scarlet shadows spewing sanctified death from their holy weapons, roasting penitents and sinners alike in the Emperor's purifying fires of retribution.

Coughing violently, her lungs full of acrid fumes, Crazy Maisy dodged a blundering, smoke-blinded hiver and ducked into cover behind a large water butt. A few more hacking paroxysms and the coughing fit passed. All around her was chaos and confusion as holesteaders ran to and fro through the streets of the gambling town, with no idea where they were going. Splashing her face with the stagnant, green-skinned soup that passed for water in the huge barrel, Maisy tired to locate the rest of the gang.

The Hive Tigers had only come to Lucky Break for a bit of rest and relaxation, after collecting on the Graff Brothers contract, but rather than a couple of night's fun at the gaming tables and winding up the locals in the drinking dens, instead they had found themselves in the middle of a Redemptionist Crusade! She had met and dealt with the insane devotees of House Cawdor before, but these Redemptionists were madder than she was.

There had to be an easier way for a girl to make a living than this, she thought. The saloon-girls of Lucky Break had certainly seemed to be enjoying the high life – that was until the Redemption had showed up in town.

Maisy could hear someone shouting over the screams of the terrified populace and the roaring conflagration. It was a man's voice, booming and authoritative, as if its owner was used to being obeyed, no matter what, and one that had total conviction in the message it preached.

'It is your foul living that brought the spider plague upon us,' the voice proclaimed, 'your debauchery that summoned the swarms of flies, your lack of faith that made the mould harvest fail, your ungodliness that caused the Ratskins to rise against us! So sayeth His most holy Apostle Cinnabar!'

Maisy suddenly found herself caught up in the press of panicking gamblers, bar-girls, prospectors, and hired scum trying to flee the town. She tried to elbow her way out of the pack, which, bizarrely, actually seemed to be carrying her towards the so far unseen preacher. Then suddenly the mob parted and the Escher girl stumbled, ending up on her knees in front a pair of scuffed and

scratched black rat-hide boots.

She let her gaze rise and took in first the frayed, once golden hem of a robe, then its soot-blackened, once crimson, heavy sackcloth folds, the racking slide shotgun holstered in a sturdy gun-belt, the bandolier loaded with wide-calibre shells, and the scorch-muzzled flamer, its pilot light a needle of brilliant blue flame, the air around it shimmering with heat-haze. The man's face was covered by a polished, ebony devil-mask carved with a leering, unseemly expression. Behind the lunatic priest stood his anonymously-masked and cowled followers.

The Apostle Cinnabar in turn looked down at the purple-haired girl ganger, clad in laced-up leather trousers and pink nylon crop top, with undisguised disgust, as if she were the cultist of some unspeakable, carnally-obsessed deity.

'Tempter!' the gargoyle-masked man screamed at her, unexpectedly. 'How dare you prostrate yourself before the Apostle Cinnabar, Harbinger of the Holy Redemption, offering yourself to him like some voluptuous incarnation of man's most wanton and base desires?'

What was this guy like? 'You don't want to do this,' Maisy hissed, feeling her cheeks reddening with angry heat.

'Vile harlot! Prepare to be judged by the weight of your own sins!' the slaving Apostle screamed, turning the nozzle of his flamer on her.

One concentrated thought was all it took. The Apostle Cinnabar went hurtling ten metres backwards, smashing aside his zealot lackeys in his flight. Maisy didn't know how she did it, just that she could. It was a talent she had, that was all she could describe it as, a talent that had saved her from certain death more times than she cared to remember. The surrounding crowd gasped and before anybody else noticed, Crazy Maisy was gone.

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