

NECROMUNDA

UNDERHIVE

SPIDER
DEMON

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 hunter watched as the bionically altered figure trudged onwards through the metal forest of collapsed scaffolding, punctuated now and then by a fallen monolithic slab of rockcrete. Prey, the hunter thought. Prey for the hunt.

* * * * *

Hearing the crunching footsteps getting nearer, Nesting Python remained perfectly still where he lay on the flat girder beam over the Ratskin path that wound through the ash dunes, so as not to give his position away to whoever, or whatever, it was that approached. He had felt the clumping footsteps before he had even heard them and it had given them all the time he needed to get into position.

Whatever it was that had strayed into his tribe's territory was unknowingly about to become his prey. Its head would become the trophy by which he would prove he had passed the Rite of First Blood and earned the right to be recognised as a warrior of the Redsnake Tribe, a brave no longer. Feeling the juddering stomping even up on the beam, Nesting Python curled his forefinger around the trigger of his handbow.

Then his prey rounded the side of a rockcrete boulder and the young Ratskin balked. His potential prey was an ugly, hugely-muscled, mohican-haired monster, half-man and half-machine, like something from one of the ghost legends of his people.

But, Nesting Python considered, if he brought down a monster such as this he would earn the respect of even the most hardened warriors of his tribe and Purple Moss would be the one wooing him rather than spurning his advances, as she had done ever since they were children.

Athletically, and silent as methane mist, the Ratskin swung down from the girder, depressing the trigger of his handbow as he did so. The dart flew true and struck the hulking, buzz saw-armed fiend squarely in the chest. Nesting Python landed in a crouch in front of the man-machine, but rather than finding himself facing a dying enemy he was now face-to-face with an enraged beast. Could it be that the creature was somehow immune to the Widowmaker venom he had tipped his arrowheads with?

The man-machine's flesh and blood fist struck him like an iron fist and sent him flying. As Nesting Python scabbled in the dirt for his handbow, his erstwhile prey fired up its jagged-toothed saw blade.

Sudden as a striking ash-viper, something dropped from the darkness above them on a glittering line and, before the cyborg could take another step, thrust half-metre long steel claws through skin, metal, muscle and bone in one grinding

scream of a thrust. Vomiting blood, the man-machine was hoisted into the air so that its iron-shod feet dangled just above the ground.

Nesting Python only caught a glimpse of this new insectoid, chitinous spine-armoured, bulbous-eyed creature before it disappeared back into the darkness, pulling the man-machine's heavy body with it, but it was enough. He knew what it was that had saved his life and it made him feel sick to his stomach. Spider Daemon, the brave thought, and with that Nesting Python picked himself up and ran.

* * * * *

High on a narrow platform jutting from the concave curving wall of the dome, the Malcadon Spyre Hunter added the Goliath's head to the carefully arranged pile it had collected since the hunt had begun. Twelve so far, and many more where they had come from. Prey just waiting for the kill.

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