

NECROMUNDIA
UNDERHIVE

**THE BATTLE
FOR DOME 7-7-3**

JONATHON GREEN



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A NECROMUNDA SHORT STORY

THE BATTLE FOR DOME SEVEN-SEVEN-THREE

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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.*

Gunfire raked the grilled metal walkway, suspended high over the rutted and crater-pocked, slag-waste floor of the dome, on heavy-linked chains. Shotgun shells spanging off the metal gangway, last-bolts leaving molten pinholes in the handrails and flicking flakes of rust from the corroded metal pipe, the ganger, hunkered down to make himself as small a target as possible, scurried over the fragile, giddily swinging bridge to safety behind a sturdy pillar, several metres in diameter.

Back in cover, slamming another energy cell into his own laspistol, Vito Scald, leader of the Orlock gang known as Scald's Hotheads, darted a glance around the iron pillar he was sheltering behind and took in his gang's disposition around the dome in an instant. His men – juves, gangers, heavies, all – were scattered around and over the ruined structures of the derelict dome, as were their rivals for the territory, the muscle-bound, meathead Goliaths of the Ironfist Gang.

Dome Seven-Seven-Three, also known as Kasto's Claim, was a ruin with nothing to offer an ambitious gang on the make, home now only to Ripperjacks and other hive vermin. But Dome Seven-Seven-Three was the prize nonetheless, for it was the gateway to the mineral and ore rich seams of the Fingel's Rift.

Scald's Hotheads were armed with a hotchpotch of weapons, from autoguns and serrated-edged knives to flamers and even the occasional heavy weapon. Life had been good to them of late and they had been able to get hold of the best armaments money could buy in Mercury Falls. And slowly but surely they were prevailing against the apparently more robust opponents. It was quite simply a case of brains over brawn, Vito considered.

Suddenly an Orlock braced against a twisted spar, jutting up from the broken ground twenty metres below, was enveloped in a ball of incandescent fire. Screaming like a stuck face-eater, the burning young man fell writhing to the ground. Vito looked to where the fireball had originated and saw the hulking, steroid-boosted form of a renegade pit slave.

The cybernetically-enhanced monster still had Guild ownership studs implanted in his skull, just as he still sported the over-sized, piston-driven rock-hammer that replaced his right arm. In fact, he appeared to be more machine than man, much of his body supported by a crude exoskeleton. In his remaining hand the pit slave held a recharging plasma gun, its coils glowing blue with building energy. Vito recognised the outlaw pit slave, as one Crusher Harlon, from bounty flyers he had seen posted around the trading post of Fluke's Breach.

There was the rattling roar of a heavy stubber as Big Aldo located the pit slave

in his sights. Sparks flew where stub gun shells impacted against the metal portions of the slave and blood sprayed where they hit what flesh remained. Such a hail of bullets would have killed any other ganger where he stood but it only caused the pit slave to stagger backwards as his unnaturally augmented body soaked up the barrage of bullets. But that in itself was enough.

As Harlon was forced back by Aldo's stubber assault, one iron-shod foot slid over the slime-slick lip of a steaming chem-pit. The top-heavy slave lost his balance and toppled backwards into the lurid, acid-yellow sludge with a gloopy splash. It seemed to Vito that the toxic soup began to boil and putrid, gaseous smoke rose in clouds from the chem-pit.

Suddenly an acid-blackened figure lurched out of the pit and fell to the ground, spasming fitfully. It took Vito a moment to realise that it was the pit slave's scorched exoskeleton and bionic attachments, all that was left of Crusher Harlon.

With the death of the pit slave the Ironfist gang really was in trouble and Vito could see, by his ugly grimacing expression, that the Goliaths' leader, Nastrol Skedge, knew it. Now was Vito's chance, to not only claim Kasto's Claim for himself but to bring down the mighty Nastrol 'The Executioner' Skedge, at the same time. Laspistol on rapid-auto Vito ran out from cover bellowing with one adrenalin-fuelled yell of joy and fighting frenzy.

A retina-searing bolt of energy streaked past him with a shrieking hiss as it burnt a path through the air, leaving behind it the tinny smell of ozone. The las-bolt sliced cleanly through a link in one of the chains supporting the walkway twenty metres above the fragmented floor of the dome. The grilled gangway listed badly. Robbed of one support, the extra strain placed on another corroded bolt finally became too much and the pin sheared.

Vito suddenly found the world dropping away before him and one end of the walkway swung downwards, and the rubble-strewn dome floor rushed up to meet him as he was thrown forward into empty space.

As he plummeted groundward, the Orlock caught sight of the leather coated, bald-headed figures that had entered the dome. The fight for Dome Seven-Seven- Three was far from over, but for Vito Scald it was.

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