

NECROMUNDA®

SCAR CROSSED

NICK KYME



NECROMUNDA

SCAR CROSSED

NICK KYME



CONTENTS

Cover

Scar Crossed – Nick Kyme

About the Author

A Black Library Publication

eBook license

SCAR CROSSED

Nick Kyme

The first shot hits the door-warden in the shoulder. Karg is a big man, mainly gene-bulked muscle with a little excess flab, so he takes the saloon door off as he smashes through it. His pirouette is almost balletic before the second shot takes him in the back and puts him down for good.

Two shots, one after the other – slugger rounds. Messy. Stunned silence sweeps through the bar, followed by six rangy creeps wearing dirty trench coats and flare goggles. They step over Karg's corpse, spreading out around the body to cover every angle. Facial ink marks these fellas as the Thronesworn, and never a more homicidal clan of zealots could you ever have the misfortune to meet in this part of the underhive. House Cawdor. I can smell the incense from where I am sitting, and practically taste the condescension and thinly veiled hypocrisy through the slug of Wild Snake I loll around my mouth.

I look up as their preacher enters the bar. Taller than his six thugs, he has no trench coat but wears black robes under a red flak jacket. His hood is up but I can see his teeth below the line of shadow covering his eyes. They are sharp and yellow. Like plague rats' teeth.

'This place reeks of sin,' announces the preacher, his voice a wire-taut shriek. 'I see the unclean, the intoxicated, the debauched. Defilers all. Behold! The hand of righteous flame!'

A spit of fire lights up the gloomy bar from the preacher's gaping sleeve, exposing the stains and the otherwise dilapidated condition of the place. Most of the patrons hiss or clench their teeth, light as anathema to them as bathwater, judging by the overall stench.

I lean over for a closer look, idly wondering which wretch the preacher will latch onto first, and hear the smashing of glass. Slow-witted and bleary-eyed, it

takes me a moment or two to realise that I am the cause of the ruckus. A shattered bottle of Wild Snake lies at my feet.

Just as I am lamenting the loss of some decidedly worse-than-average grog, the preacher turns his steely zealotry upon me.

‘Sinner!’ he proclaims, and seems to glide across the floor, his trench-coated thugs in tow. The other patrons wisely let him through.

I am about to move when my rump slips on the stool where I am sitting and I stumble backwards. I snatch at the edge of the bar, my fingers digging into the rotwood like claws, but keep my feet.

‘S... inn... er?’ I slur at length, trying to appear indignant.

The preacher comes in close, his rancid breath washing over me.

‘Your drunken excess is an affront to the Emperor of Mankind.’ He brings his left hand up to my left eye and I notice the small flamer he has attached to his wrist. It looks custom. Decent work. Deadly. He has the look of a man who likes burning things, I decide. A sadist-arsonist. A sarsonist? Arsodist? Never mind.

I try to take a step back before he torches me, but feel a gun barrel jab my kidneys.

‘Now, hang on a second, fellas...’ I say, my drunkenness diminishing at the same rate as my sense of peril increases.

‘Fire shall purge the wicked,’ promises the preacher, an eager glint in his eye that I do not like one bit.

I raise my hands in a plaintive gesture.

‘Can we at least discuss this like civilised...?’ I take in the expressionless faces of the Cawdor thugs, their bleached white skin, shaven heads, thin grey lips and blank-eyed goggles. My own face, somewhat worse for wear but growing ever more cognizant, reflects back at me. I look terrified. And with good reason.

‘Confess your guilt,’ snaps the preacher. ‘Confess and you shall be welcomed into the loving arms of the Immortal Emperor.’

‘Well,’ I say, trying to swallow the acrid aftertaste of vomit in the back of my throat, ‘you’ve kind of got me in a bit of a bind here.’ Belatedly, I smell the low quality grain alcohol – or sump alcohol, I don’t know, it was bad either way – soaking my shirt and breeches.

The preacher gives me an ugly smile and I hear him feed fuel to his wrist-mounted burner.

‘Wait, wait!’ I say. ‘I have a story about love, of true love against the odds. Surely, there is no finer thing in the underhive, no finer affirmation of the Emperor’s benevolence than that?’

The preacher regards me as he might a suspicious-looking stain on his robe. His thugs remain statuesque, their guns loaded and menacing.

‘Listen to it, and I promise to agree to whatever punishment you deem fit,’ I say. ‘I’ll even give up my disorderly ways and swear to your creed. But if you like my story, you let me go? You won’t get a better offer this side of the sump pit.’

Silence falls again, as every man, woman and mutant in the bar holds their breath. I like to think they are rooting for my survival, but I suspect they just want to watch a man burn.

The preacher’s eyes narrow, as if he’s trying to decide whether I am speaking truthfully. Zealots aren’t known for their shrewdness, and I hoped this would play in my favour.

He nods. I feel the need to void my bladder, but fear that he’d take it as renegeing on the deal somehow.

‘Good, *good*,’ I say, licking dry lips and offering an ironic prayer to the Throne for the stay of execution. ‘Listen well, then, to a tale of two ignoble houses alike in indignity, in Infernal Corona where they laid their schemes...’

Rom had taken the spillway. It was dark, and the tunnels were tight with debris from the last hive collapse. Hundreds had died in that quake. Their shiny bones jutted between pipes, girders and several tons of low-grade ferrocrete. They’d been picked clean. Meat, human or otherwise, didn’t last long in the underhive. He found a passage upwards, a broken gantry he could use as a ladder. He moved fast as he heard sump rats gathering in the dark behind him. As big as dogs, sump rats.

One had got ahead of him, red eyes twinkling like bad rubies as it stared down at Rom from the top of the makeshift ladder. It leapt, fangs bared, but Rom’s hand snaked out whip-quick and seized the creature around its rangy neck. A twist of the wrist and he heard the bone crack before he tossed the vermin below.

‘Eat up, you evil bastards.’

Rom hauled himself out of the tunnel, and left behind a cacophony of hungry screeching.

He emerged inside a disused pump room. The machine was dead, rusted over and stripped for parts long ago. A stairwell, mostly intact, led upwards. Rom took it.

A gallery space beckoned after the stairwell, a refectory hall, possibly for the workers. Like the bones in the spillway, it had been picked clean. A few old

bloodstains remained, and some spent shell casings. As Rom made his way through the long hall, he stooped beside some of the casings, but they were too bashed up to be of use.

He was about to press on when a voice stopped him cold.

‘You’re a long way from home, juve.’

The voice was female, young.

Rom raised his hands. He had a knife in his belt and a holstered stubber, but his mind was on the sawn-off shotgun strapped to his back. His fingers edged towards the stock.

‘Ah, ah...’ warned the voice, and Rom heard the low whine of a laspistol priming to fire. He couldn’t see his assailant, but judging from her voice he guessed she was behind him in his blind spot.

‘How’d *you* know,’ he said. ‘This is *my* turf.’

She laughed, and he felt a slight tingle.

‘No Scar-Kings have ruled here for years. This is Razor-Queen territory.’

‘Is it now...’ said Rom. ‘I heard it was disputed.’

‘Ongoing,’ she replied.

‘So, what now, girlie?’

Rom flinched as a bolt of hot las missed his crotch by an inch. A small dot of scorched black metal smouldered just beneath where he was crouching.

‘*Milady*... A little respect or I’ll shoot something off that you’d rather not be without.’

Rom gave a little shake of his head and smiled ruefully.

‘What now... *milady*.’

‘Up.’

Rom threw open the hatch and climbed out onto a heavy mesh platform. It had been a loading bay but was empty of cargo. A vaulted roof stretched for hundreds of feet, so high he could barely see its apex. Fog occluded the view anyway, smudged by patches of yellow from the distant silo lamps. He turned, looking back down the pipe that had led up to the loading platform and caught his first glance of the girl. She was young, a little younger than him. Bright pink mohawk, the left side of her head shaved and dyed blue. A few strands of pink hair hanging down. A tight vest hugged her breasts, accentuating the curves. The armour plates had been sprayed viridian. Chain mesh hung from the bottom of the vest, swaying around a toned midriff. Her bare arms were muscular, but more athletic than juiced, and her black boots went all the way to her knees.

‘Eyes up,’ she warned, wagging the laspistol at him. It had a custom sight, the red-dot hovering over Rom’s forehead.

‘Can’t a man offer a lady some assistance?’ he said innocently. He held out his hand to her, muscle and sinew glistening in the overhead sodium glow. The spikes on his leather wristband winked in the light, hinting at their sharpness and lethality. He thought again about his stubber, his knife.

‘Back off. Stay where I can see you,’ she said, as an errant strand of hair fell across her eye. She had a scar. Just like him. Hers cut her face, a razor wound, hence the gang name. His crossed his torso in a crude ‘X’. Not very kingly, he had to admit.

Rom obeyed.

He kept his eyes on her as she climbed out, and she kept hers on him.

As they stood facing each other, she said, ‘Rom “the Reaper”.’

Rom gave a mocking bow, the chains around his neck rattling noisily.

‘My legend precedes me.’ He smiled, exposing a few missing teeth, and ran a meaty hand over his closely shorn scalp. It was split in two by a stubby mohawk that paled in magnificence to the girl’s.

‘Hardly. Did you choose that name for yourself?’

He took a step closer, a slight swagger in his walk.

‘What if I did?’ he asked in a deep voice.

‘Then I’d say you have a high opinion of yourself.’

‘Is that right?’ He took another step. ‘And what do they call you?’

‘Yuli,’ she said, her voice sinking to a husky whisper as Rom closed. They were almost touching. ‘The Siren.’

‘That you are,’ purred Rom, letting the laspistol push against his chest as he drew Yuli close.

‘Yeah...’ uttered Yuli, looking up into Rom’s eyes, ‘and don’t you forget it.’

They kissed, long and hard, the pretence falling away as quickly as Yuli’s laspistol.

‘I missed you,’ said Rom as they parted.

‘I can tell,’ said Yuli, and raised her eyebrow. A quirk of a smile vanished as quickly as it appeared, a much darker expression replacing it. ‘They’ll kill us if they ever find out.’

Rom gently held her cheek. It felt small but strong in his massive hand.

‘I’m the Reaper. No one touches me. Or you.’

He was about to run a soot-stained finger over her blue-painted lips when Yuli frowned.

‘They will *kill* us, Rom.’

His smile faded. ‘I know, I know.’

‘Ulet is already suspicious. She has me followed.’

A tremor of alarm registered in a nerve in Rom’s cheek and his hand fell away from Yuli’s face.

‘You never told me that.’

‘It’s a recent development.’

‘Scav,’ he swore, backing off and turning away.

‘Don’t worry,’ she said, trying to be soothing and closing the distance again to put her hands on his broad shoulders. ‘I gave her the slip.’

Rom turned to face her, wearing a half-smile, and only half convinced. He was about to say something when another voice interrupted.

‘Yeah, but *he’s* not so smart.’

Yuli whirled around just as a figure stepped from the shadows.

‘Reach for that and I’ll kill you both.’ A Razor-Queen emerged onto the platform, a stubber held in each outstretched hand. She wore the same colours as Yuli, but was older, meaner looking, more heavily armoured. Thick spikes protruded from her boots, and she had three scars to Yuli’s one.

Rom held up his hands for the second time that day. He didn’t like that it was becoming a habit.

‘Landra... please,’ said Yuli.

Rom’s jaw clenched to hear her beg like that.

‘Step aside, juve,’ snapped Landra, in no mood for negotiation. ‘Ulet wants to deal with you later.’

‘Do it, Yuli,’ Rom said softly. He leaned in close to her ear. She smelled like sweet cordite. ‘It’s all right.’ When he felt her about to resist he lightly touched her hand. ‘It’s all right.’

Yuli stepped away as Landra stepped forward to make sure of the kill. She sneered at Rom.

‘Dirty fragging—’

A flash of light punctured her throat. The wound cauterised instantly, but the damage was done. She sagged, losing all her strength, then collapsed, glaring at her murderer.

Yuli looked back emotionless, laspistol smoking in her grasp, as Landra fell forwards and did not stir again.

‘Holy shit, Yuli,’ said Rom, hurrying down next to Landra to make sure she was dead.

‘Get rid of her,’ she answered coldly, and gestured to the edge of the platform. ‘Over the edge into the sump pit.’

One side of the platform was bracketed to the industrial structure of the spillway and pump stations but the other side fell into a deep, oily oblivion – the sump pit, a lagoon of toxic crud some hundred feet or so below.

Rom hauled Landra over the edge and they watched the body plummet until it was lost to swirling, bile-yellow fumes.

‘Nothing and no one stands between us,’ vowed Yuli. ‘Not even kin.’

Rom pulled her close. She looked fierce.

‘I’ll kill them all if I have to. Grue, Ulet, every one of them.’

He felt a warm sensation growing over his back as the heavy lamps of uphive began to glow. A solar harvesting grid, a mass hydroponics farm... no one knew where the light came from, only that it did. This was the Infernal Corona, and its light bled across most of this part of the underhive. It was as close to the sun as anyone downhive was ever going to get. Cascading down on them from the vaulted roof, it was almost beautiful.

‘I have a plan,’ said Rom, holding Yuli close. ‘A way out. Uphive. A cache. No one else knows.’

‘Archeotech?’

Rom nodded, grinning. ‘It’s buried treasure, Yuli. A chance at something better.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me?’

‘I am telling you. Now. I couldn’t risk anyone else finding out about it.’

‘What the hell will we do with it?’ Yuli asked, her eyes far away but already imagining a new life.

‘Anything we damn well want.’

Yuli looked back at Rom. She was smiling. ‘I never even dreamed...’

‘Now you don’t have to. It’s what we wanted. No more gangs, no more fighting to live. We can be together. I need to go back to the Ironyard first, but then—’

‘Rom...’ said Yuli, looking up into his eyes. ‘Shut up.’

He did.

They sank down onto the platform, the Infernal Corona bathing them in its mildly radioactive glow, and forgot about Razor-Queens and Scar-Kings and the gangers that would certainly kill them if they ever found out they were together.

From across the vaulted sump pit, inside one of the disused silos, unfriendly eyes regarded the lovers through the dirty lenses of an old ocular scope. A whirring

sound echoed dully as the picter device powered down, too far away and smothered by industrial noise to be heard by anyone but its owner.

The watcher snapped the scope shut and dropped it into his belt pouch. Then he scurried away into the darkness, smiling at all the creds he was about to make.

Grue regarded the wretch with cold and obvious disdain.

‘You bring me here on the word of this shit stain?’

He leaned forward in his ‘throne’. Large, even for a Goliath, the synth-leather creaked ominously under Grue’s stumm-fed bulk. His men called him ‘Mount’, and with good reason. He was lord of the Scar-Kings and expected to be treated as such, hence the throne. It was a pilot’s chair, ripped from a gunship crash-landed downhive. A gift from the heavens. Grue had the gunship’s autocannon laid menacingly across his lap. In his hands it looked wieldable one-handed.

The wretch, a weaselling scavvy called Runt, visibly shrank before the Mount’s gaze, but it was the saw-boned woman behind him that he was really scared of.

‘Show him,’ demanded Ulet, she of the Razor-Queens, their leader and known as ‘Carve’ on account of how she liked to cut her rivals to ribbons. The dry-blooded chain-blade on her back provided unnecessary evidence of her commitment to this task.

She nudged Runt with a cleaver. She carried a lot of blades.

Grue looked askance at the pair of Scar-Kings he had brought with him to this parlay, one-eyed Skafe and ‘Handsome’ Hector with the metal spikes studding his face like bad acne. They shared some private joke.

Ulet’s Razor-Queens, Hekka ‘Three-Fingers’ and ‘Tiny’ Friga, stared daggers but the old truce kept their weapons holstered.

They had met in a dockyard, an expansive square of pitted ferrocrete that was light on cover but also offered little by way of vantage for any potential snipers.

‘Can’t kill you, won’t give up the turf for you,’ said Grue, surveying the grey horizon for the fourth time in as many minutes. ‘You reckon this’ll change all that?’ He gestured to the rad-scarred scavvy. Runt fumbled with the device, grubby fingers slick with fear.

Ulet didn’t bite. She might later. She glowered, her hard eyes boring into Runt like ice drills.

‘Hurry up!’ she snapped, and started to pace.

She was old for a ganger, but rangy and tough. A few grey hairs poked through the red dye, and six scars marked her right cheek, another six the left. Her carapace armour looked thick and was military-grade. Some said she had fallen

in love with a Guardsman, part of the Necromundan tithe owed to the Imperial war machine, but that he'd betrayed her. She'd exacted her revenge right enough and taken his gear as recompense. True or not, she cut an imposing figure.

'Do it!' she screamed. 'Or I will cut you open from crotch to—'

The device chugged into activation, a relieved Runt scurrying back, head bowed in contrition. He shuffled away to make room for the hololithic image he had captured. It was grainy, flickering and indistinct. Grue leaned even further forwards, his knuckles whitening around the stock of his cannon as the feed played out.

Ulet stood back, seething in silent anger.

When it was done, Grue made a proclamation.

'I will frekking kill her for this.'

'You won't touch her!' snapped Ulet, her posture promising violence. 'Or I'll slit his throat.'

Grue smiled belligerently. 'You know I can't allow that.'

Guns were loaded. Slides racked.

'Please, please...' whimpered Runt. 'Who will pay?'

Ulet shot him through the head, and then trained the stub pistol on Grue.

'Oh,' said Grue, patting the autocannon he had aimed in Ulet's direction. 'It's like that, is it?'

Ulet then revealed the demo-charge strapped to her thigh. A blinking light on the incendiary block said it was armed.

'It's like that,' she replied, smiling with grim amusement as Grue paled a little.

'Let's not be hasty,' said Grue, deciding not to comment on the sagacity of strapping live explosives to your body. He gave a half-glance to Runt, whose shattered skull was spilling its contents all over the ground. 'Think of the truce.'

'I might be tiring of the truce,' Ulet admitted. Hekka and Friga were inches away from drawing down on the Scar-Kings.

Grue sneered. 'You don't have the guns to take us down.'

'And you don't have the balls to beat me,' Ulet shot back. Her anger ebbed. She regarded the hololith, frozen in the final seconds of image capture, Yuli and Rom locked in a lovers' clinch. She looked almost sad, before her resolve hardened. 'But this cannot stand.' Her gaze fell back upon Grue. 'I won't let you kill Yuli, and you won't allow me to gut your little juve. Sounds like war to me.'

As he nodded, Grue's eyes narrowed. 'That's definitely one way to go, but I think I have another solution.'

An hour later, Ulet returned to Suicide Bridge with Hekka and Frigga. The sharp two-fingered whistle of sentries greeted them upon their arrival and a crane lift slowly lowered to take them up into the Razor-Queens' stronghold, a sturdy plascrete tower with a half-collapsed bridge jutting from its western facing. Ulet liked to bring her enemies here sometimes. She'd offer them a ritual death, either at the end of one of her blades or the long drop from the bridge. That's how it got the name.

'Well?' asked Hekka, as they rode the crane lift up the side of the tower.

Ulet used the tip of her knife to dislodge a piece of gristle from her teeth. She nodded.

'We let it play out. Then after Grue's man kills the juve, we slaughter every one of them.'

Grue reached the Ironyard, his mind awash with schemes. His enemies were constantly underestimating him, and as he rose from his synth-leather throne and began to pace beneath the cold ore smelters and the swinging gantries, a plan formed.

'Find him,' he said to Skafe, 'and make the offer like I said.'

'And then?' asked Skafe, his voice nasally because of his thick nose ring.

'We make the meet, then after the juve is dead we kill the rest of those bitches.'

Rom pressed his back against the strut of the ore smelter, ignoring the rough metal cutting into his skin. His heart hammered like a piston-driver. Grue's voice was still echoing around the Ironyard. He clutched the pack close to his chest. He had guns, a little water and the map. A pair of low-grade re-breather masks hung around his neck on stretched elastek. The digging tools felt heavy against his leg from where he'd tied them off to his belt. The only thing he didn't have was time.

'Shit...' he whispered, and as soon as Grue and the others had gone, he fled.

Bharde examined the empty state of his dirty glass, reclining in a threadbare chair, feet propped up on a grubby stool. He tapped the rim of the glass twice, and looked up at his would-be employer.

'Thirsty work, negotiation,' he said.

The buyer nodded, and a tough-looking wench poured another slug of brown liquor.

'Now, now, don't be frugal,' said Bharde, and waited until his glass was brimming over. He took a long pull, gulping the liquor down. 'That's better.' He

wiped his mouth and beard with the back of his hand.

The bar was dingy and Bharde hugged the shadows, wrapping them around him like a murky blanket. He had good boots, thick with a decent tread, no holes. The metal toecaps shone in the light of rasping sodium lamps. An off-white shirt maintained the illusion of civility, as did the fine breeches, but his eyes had the look of a killer and betrayed the nature of his profession. So did the pair of heavy-gauge bolt pistols holstered on his gun belt. He'd left his duster coat open just enough to show them off.

'It's intriguing,' he said, and stroked a beard that ended in a neatly trimmed fork. 'Two jobs, one day...' He whistled. 'Praise the Throne indeed. Tell me again,' he added, sitting up and leaning forwards to close the distance between him and the buyer, 'how much and how many?'

It had taken several hours to reach the wastes. Situated right at the edge of the district, but not much lower than the sump pit where Landra's corpse was no doubt krogor chum by now, the wastes began where part of the outer hive wall had suffered a serious collapse and exposed the region to the raging ash storms outside. Several layers of this grey crud had accreted on the ground, which made digging up anything buried beneath a long and arduous task.

Rom toiled in the shadow of a metal overhang, a rag-edged reminder of the level above. Sweat glistened on his bare skin and his re-breather goggles had fogged up almost completely.

Yuli looked on, standing at the edge of the crater Rom had already dug, her own mask drawn down. She fidgeted nervously, casting a glance in the direction of the deeper hive every few minutes.

'Have you found it?' she asked, her voice crackling through a rudimentary vox-bead.

Rom stopped, and stabbed his shovel into the grey, flaky ground. He stomped back over to Yuli, grateful for the cover offered by the side of a large cargo crate that was half submerged and slowly surrendering to the relentless ash.

'It's deeper than I thought,' he admitted, wiping the lens of his goggles and pulling out the wastelands map for another look. The area was large, and there were few landmarks. Some had disappeared in the weeks since Rom had buried his trove, swallowed up by the elements. 'Storm isn't helping, either.'

'You sure it's still here?'

Rom looked at her through smeared lenses. He nodded.

'It has to be.'

‘What if you can’t find it?’

‘I’ll find it.’ He looked up. Even above the storm he could hear the telltale crank-grind of the Infernal Corona starting to activate. It flared every few hours. The timing was precise. It meant they had been here for longer than he’d intended.

‘I’ll find it,’ he repeated, tucking the map back into his belt, and retrieving the shovel. He carried on digging.

Bharde scowled. He was looking through magnoculars at a muscular young ganger digging for his life out in the wastes. He hated storms. He hated the outside in general, even if this was inside/outside. Getting rad-ash out of your hair wasn’t easy. It would also abrade his clothes. Ruin them in truth.

‘No one said anything about ash wastes,’ he chuntered to himself.

He crouched east of the lovers, low and invisible behind a barricade of industrial debris. It was a decent vantage, high up, the old highway sloping down to the lower level. A mile out, no chance they would see him, not in all that filth. There were several ways in to the wastes, though even amongst the wretched inhabitants of the underhive few ever used them. Everything of value here had been stripped and repurposed long ago.

Bharde nodded, and his lip curled in an expression of respect. He had to admit, it was a good hiding place. He panned the magnoculars to the west and north. South led out into the wastes proper. No one was coming from that way.

He smiled as he found both ‘Mount’ Grue and ‘Carve’ Ulet, one approaching from the west, the other the north, both picking through the dense industrial terrain with their bodyguards in tow.

‘Scar-Kings and Razor-Queens with common accord,’ he said, finding the notion amusing, ‘who’d have thought...’

He sighed, put the magnoculars away and set off at a brisk run.

Grue allowed himself a grin. The old truce had kept his ambitions stymied for years. It had broken down of course, hostility was the way of things in the underhive, but neither the Scar-Kings nor the Razor-Queens had ever managed to wipe out the other and assume dominance. Both wanted war, neither liked the cost.

He had decided to betray Ulet the moment he saw the pict-feed of Rom with that girl. Honour demanded something be done, and for both gang leaders to be present to witness it. Despite the murders, the betrayals, all the blood, a fragile code remained. It stayed Grue’s hand for now, and his rival’s more importantly.

‘Soon as the juves are dead,’ he told his men, ‘all bets are off.’

‘Ulet will see this coming,’ said Skafe.

‘Maybe, but she won’t see our reinforcements coming from behind her. And she won’t know I paid that scummer extra to lend his guns to ours.’

Skafe grinned back at his leader. ‘Oh yeah, she’s a dead woman.’

‘He’ll betray us,’ said Hekka, vaulting over a broken waste pipe.

‘Yes, he will,’ Ulet replied. ‘He wants this war as badly as us.’

The truce had lasted overlong, and she was tired of sharing. It wasn’t in her nature. The Infernal Corona was Razor-Queen territory, lock, stock and barrel.

‘And his contact, the bounty hunter?’

Ulet gave a viper’s smile.

‘There’ll be eyes on him too.’ She looked ahead, to where the wastes were blowing in and the old watchtower where she’d sent Friga on ahead to take up position. ‘I know someone who’s been dying to try out a new rifle-scope.’

‘I heard Bharde was pretty good,’ said Hekka.

‘He is. But don’t worry,’ Ulet replied. ‘Grue is a cheap bastard. Even with whatever extra he’s bumped the scummer’s way, we’ll outbid him if it comes to that. Turn the tables. And if that doesn’t work...’ she said, tapping the demo-charges strapped to her thighs, ‘I’ll blow them all to hell.’

Rom’s shovel struck the side of something heavy and unyielding. The cache was deeper than he remembered, but this was definitely it. He could see the edge of a metal crate and managed to lever it out. The lid yielded to a blow from the shovel, then he yanked it aside. The archeotech hoard was still there. It was priceless, and Rom felt a surge of triumph. Ash was coming in hard, making it tougher and tougher to see, so when he turned to Yuli to give the thumbs up, he almost missed the hazy figure looming behind her.

She must have seen something in Rom’s posture, because she turned as Rom started to go for his pistol.

‘I wouldn’t do that if I were you,’ shouted the figure, his voice amplified through the upgraded re-breather swallowing his mouth and nose.

For a moment the ash swathes lessened in intensity, and Rom saw a tall man wearing a long duster coat. He had good boots on, and his clothes looked decent too, but it was the pair of military-grade bolt pistols he had trained on Rom and Yuli that captured the juve’s attention.

Rom pulled down his re-breather. He wanted this bastard to see the anger in his face. Yuli did the same, though her expression was pleading.

‘I am sorry, you two,’ said the tall man. ‘I am a fool for love, it’s true, but I like money more.’ He levelled the guns, both aimed for the centre mass. ‘I would say this won’t hurt, but that would be a lie.’

Then the Infernal Corona flared as blinding as magnesium, swallowing the two muzzle flashes that followed.

Grue heard the shots, the throaty bark of heavy-gauge rounds. He was still blinking back the migraine-inducing afterglow of the corona when he thought he saw the two juves in the wastes go down. Then the ash blew in and really spoiled his view.

‘They dead? That’s it?’ shouted Skafe, fighting against the storm and rubbing his eyes hard.

Grue nodded, vigorously enough so that Skafe could see.

‘Kill ’em,’ he said into a vox-feed patched in to his two cohorts of gangers. ‘No one lives.’

Ulet strained to see after the flare of light. The ash wasn’t helping either, but she heard the scummer take the shots. Someone fell after.

‘Let’s do it!’ bellowed Hekka, bringing up her lasgun. ‘Let’s paint these bastards ’til they’re red and dead!’

A few seconds’ hesitation paralysed Ulet. Something felt off, but the moment was upon her and there was no more time to calculate. The corona was already fading, and only as bright as sunlight now.

She made her choice and screamed into her vox-feed. ‘Do it, do it! Friga, kill that scummer. Put one in his head!’

Gunfire erupted across the wastes, eerily muted by the storm, which was raging fiercely. An explosion tore up the grey, a smudged orange flash through the stirred up filth.

Ulet’s eyes widened in the direction of the tower as she realised what had happened.

‘Friga!’

The watchtower was down and burning, torn up by an explosive.

Then came the shouting from behind her, and Ulet reached for one of her charges.

Grue racked the autocannon and swung it in the direction of the Razor-Queens. In all this ash, he could barely aim, so he held down the trigger and sprayed instead. The recoil thundered against his body, but he roared with the sheer joy

of it. True, he might hit some of his own men who'd circled around to take Ulet out from behind, but that was life in the underhive.

He hung back and let Skafe lead the others in, using the autocannon's range to its fullest advantage.

Then he saw a figure emerging through the grey, the bounty hunter having performed his task.

'Bharde...' he said, attention only half on the approaching figure. 'Get those guns of yours on the Razor-Queens. I want those bitches dead.'

Except it wasn't Bharde, and only now as Rom closed on him did Grue realise his error. He tried to swing the autocannon around. He was strong – he was the Mount for scav's sake – but even he had his limits.

The first shot took Grue in the shoulder. It went deep into the meat, and set a fire. The second struck his head and then all Grue saw was the grey slowly turning, turning to black...

A hurled demo-charge landed right in the midst of the Scar-Kings' ranks, and Ulet watched satisfied as a series of limbs and other body parts blew skywards.

Hekka was down, her chest blown out by the scummer's hand cannons. Ulet had written her off already. No one walks away from a wound like that, not from a bolt pistol.

She waded into the fog, seeing movement and gunning her chain-blade. Red flecks painted the grey. She was screaming, exhorting her Queens and getting them to fight.

'To me, to me!' she roared, fighting to maintain some coherence in all the swirling filth and the blood.

It had turned to crap, all of it. Then, through the thinning ash storm she saw someone she recognised, someone who should be dead.

A grainy red-dot sight flickered over Ulet's chest then tracked down to a light on the other demo-charge strapped to her thigh. She stopped shouting, and even managed a rueful smile.

'Clever girl...' she said, as Yuli took the shot.

The fight was blowing out of the storm, and the ash began to settle.

A few of the gangers remained from both Kings and Queens, only now realising they had been played. The rest had run. A wise move.

Bharde killed the last few with precise headshots. In every case the skull exploded violently, littering the ground with blood and bone.

The firing stopped. Rom and Yuli were the last left standing, a gulf of ash and

shot-to-death corpses separating them. They caught sight of each other amidst the carnage, both relieved to see their partner had survived, and were about to run into each other's arms when Bharde interceded.

He crossed his arms, holding a gun on each juve.

'Much as I'm sure you'd like to consummate this mass murder, I believe you owe me what was promised?'

Rom slowed, so did Yuli.

The former Scar-King nodded.

'As promised,' he said, and gestured to the cache.

'Would you mind doing the honours?' asked Bharde. 'My back, you see. Doc says I need to rest it.' He wagged a pistol at the cache in a gesture for Rom to bring it over.

He did. Grunting with not inconsiderable effort, Rom hauled the metal crate free of the ash and dragged it to where Bharde was waiting.

'And the deal was *all* of it?' said Bharde, smiling approvingly as he saw the trove of archeotech within.

'I said one piece,' Rom argued, scowling.

Bharde hissed through his teeth, and rocked his head back and forth in a 'maybe, maybe not' motion. 'Yeah, I'm going to need all of it. Once you break the seal, it's not worth as much. And then the ash has got in, probably rendering most of this useless. It's just junk now, so you could look at this as me doing you a favour.'

Yuli had turned pale. Rom snarled and made to lunge.

Bharde's eyes hardened and all the false good humour bled away to reveal the cold-blooded killer he really was.

'Or I could put a round into your girlie here and you could watch her die before I blow your brains out.' He smiled. It was the kind of look a krogor gave you before it was about to make you its meal. 'Decisions, decisions...'

Rom slumped. His eyes found Yuli, still pale and unmoving opposite him.

'I'm sorry, Yuli,' he said, defeated. 'This was it. Everything. We'll have to find another way to get out.' His face brightened. 'At least we're free of the gangs. We can be together.'

Yuli frowned. She looked at the crate, then back to Rom, then to Bharde, who had removed his mask to reveal a handsome, if world-worn face, and then back to the crate.

Rom's eyes betrayed his fear.

Yuli's showed her flagrant ambition.

‘Yeah,’ she said, ‘about that...’ She looked at Bharde and gave him her best smile. She was really rather pretty when she did that.

Bharde smiled back, then looked at Rom.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘this is awkward.’ He raised the bolt pistol so it was level with Rom’s head. ‘Sorry, son, I would say this won’t hurt, but that would be a lie.’

The preacher grins at me, his yellow canines glistening like a rabid dog’s, and for a moment I dare to believe that he has been swayed by my tale.

That hope proves to be momentary.

‘Traitors, fornicators...’ he says, rasping each word with dry-throated zeal and the volume rising. ‘Thieves, murderers. Sin, sin, sin, sin!’ His finger jabs in my chest, punctuating each repeated accusation. I wipe a string of spittle from my collar while the preacher concludes his sermon. ‘You have enjoyed the last of your petty amusements,’ he says, his eyes promising something unpleasant in my immediate future.

He nods to his thugs as he backs away. ‘Take him!’

I feel rough hands grasp my shoulders as the Cawdor grunts try to wrestle me into submission. Two attack me from behind, while the other four close protectively around the preacher.

‘Can’t we be reasonable?’ I ask, squirming. I twist around, my eye on the other four thugs as they finally break ranks and come to assist their friends.

‘It’s a sorry state of affairs,’ I say, slipping down as the punches and kicks rain in, ‘when a man can’t be moved by love.’

It’s a melee, and the bar is dark so most of the blows don’t connect well. I feel a tooth dislodged, but as I sink down they’re mainly hitting my back and shoulders. There’s armour padding in my coat that staves off the worst of it. Still hurts like a bastard, but I’ve had nastier beatings. Man in my line of work learns to take the pain. Point is, they’re lashing out like zealots and not paying attention to what I’m actually doing. Blind rage will do that to you. So in the commotion, I manage to delve into my duster jacket and find what I am looking for. ‘One thing, I know,’ I say. ‘Love hurts.’

Three muffled booms shake the walls of the dive bar, dislodging years of filth and scattering the body parts of three of the preacher’s goons into a hysterical crowd of onlookers. Then the screaming begins.

The other three pause. They are spattered with blood, and experiencing an understandable, if fleeting, moment of doubt.

I kill all three with shots to the chest. Limbs rain down. *Literally.*

Then I pluck an object from the pocket of my duster and throw it at the preacher's unwashed feet. He squeals, terrified, suddenly aware of the gulf that has grown around him as every wretch in this dump gives him an extremely wide berth. Can't fault the wisdom in that.

'Stop wailing, you cry baby,' I say.

The preacher stops. He looks agape then nonplussed at the small metal orb before him. It's counting down in a rapidly accelerating sequence.

'By the fury of the God-Emp—'

An energy flare cuts him off, freezing him in mid-oratory.

'Stasis-grenade,' I tell anyone who gives a damn, and hook a steel line around the preacher's dirty ankle once the dispersion effect had faded. 'You'll be on ice for an hour or two,' I say, knowing he can still hear me. I see the panic in his eyes intensify, as he must realise what is coming next. 'Just long enough for me to collect the bounty on your head. Now, now, before you ask...' I add, taking the steel line in hand and hanging it over my shoulder before proceeding to drag the preacher out of the bar, 'I have no idea what my employers are going to do to you. I would tell you it won't hurt, but...' I look over my shoulder at the frozen preacher, 'Ah, you get the idea, right?'

No one stops me. They know not to mess with Bharde. You'd have to be mad. She's waiting, though. Turns out she didn't want to go uphive. She likes it down here with the drudge. She likes a cache of archeotech to flaunt too, even if I have just used one of the prized pieces.

She likes the bounty-hunting life.

'Hello, my savage beauty,' I say to Yuli, and give her one of my best smiles. She's got an extra scar or two and she's shaved her hair since we first met. 'I do believe today is a good day.'

'A very good day,' she replies with a glance at the preacher.

I nod, feeling a profound sense of fulfilment... until the muzzle of her laspistol jabs into my gut.

I frown, genuinely wounded, and about to be *actually* wounded. I look into her eyes, trying to find a shred of affection, but all I see is cold.

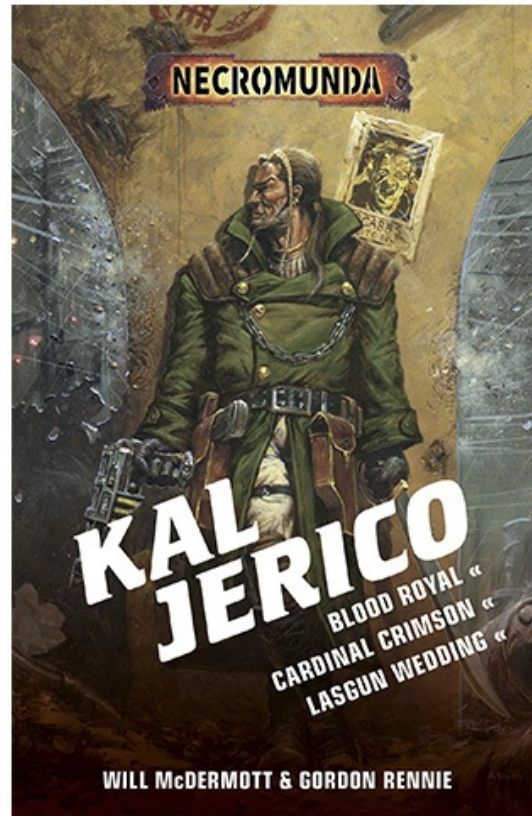
I feel the touch of her hand against my chest as she leans in to kiss me on the cheek. I reach for my bolt pistol but her weapon kicks and a painful heat flares in my gut.

'And thus with a kiss do I die.'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Kyme is the author of the Horus Heresy novels *Old Earth*, *Deathfire*, *Vulkan Lives* and *Sons of the Forge*, the novellas *Promethean Sun* and *Scorched Earth*, and the audio dramas *Censure* and *Red-Marked*. His novella *Feat of Iron* was a *New York Times* bestseller in the Horus Heresy collection, *The Primarchs*. Nick is well known for his popular Salamanders novels, including *Rebirth*, the Space Marine Battles novel *Damnus*, and numerous short stories. He has also written fiction set in the world of Warhammer, most notably the Time of Legends novel *The Great Betrayal* and the Age of Sigmar story 'Borne by the Storm', included in the novel *War Storm*. He lives and works in Nottingham, and has a rabbit.

In the underhives of Necromunda, many bounty hunters ply their trade – but none are as successful or infamous as Kal Jerico. This edition collects together three novels in one action-packed omnibus taking you into the darkest depths of the Underhive.



BUY NOW



READ IT FIRST

EXCLUSIVE PRODUCTS | EARLY RELEASES | FREE DELIVERY

blacklibrary.com

THE BLACK LIBRARY NEWSLETTER



Sign up today for updates on the
latest Black Library news and releases

[SIGN UP NOW](#)

A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION

First published in Great Britain in 2018 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Produced by Games Workshop in Nottingham.

Scar Crossed © Copyright Games Workshop Limited 2018. Scar Crossed, Necromunda, GW, Games Workshop, Black Library, The Horus Heresy, The Horus Heresy Eye logo, Space Marine, 40K, Warhammer, Warhammer 40,000, the 'Aquila' Double-headed Eagle logo, and all associated logos, illustrations, images, names, creatures, races, vehicles, locations, weapons, characters, and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are either ® or TM, and/or © Games Workshop Limited, variably registered around the world.

All Rights Reserved.

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-78572-928-7

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

See Black Library on the internet at
blacklibrary.com

Find out more about Games Workshop's world of Warhammer and the Warhammer 40,000 universe at
games-workshop.com

Find out more about the underworld of Necromunda at
necromunda.com

eBook license

This license is made between:

Games Workshop Limited t/a Black Library, Willow Road, Lenton, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, United Kingdom (“Black Library”); and

(2) the purchaser of an e-book product from Black Library website (“You/you/Your/your”)

(jointly, “the parties”)

These are the terms and conditions that apply when you purchase an e-book (“e-book”) from Black Library. The parties agree that in consideration of the fee paid by you, Black Library grants you a license to use the e-book on the following terms:

* 1. Black Library grants to you a personal, non-exclusive, non-transferable, royalty-free license to use the e-book in the following ways:

o 1.1 to store the e-book on any number of electronic devices and/or storage media (including, by way of example only, personal computers, e-book readers, mobile phones, portable hard drives, USB flash drives, CDs or DVDs) which are personally owned by you;

o 1.2 to access the e-book using an appropriate electronic device and/or through any appropriate storage media; and

* 2. For the avoidance of doubt, you are ONLY licensed to use the e-book as described in paragraph 1 above. You may NOT use or store the e-book in any other way. If you do, Black Library shall be entitled to terminate this license.

* 3. Further to the general restriction at paragraph 2, Black Library shall be entitled to terminate this license in the event that you use or store the e-book (or any part of it) in any way not expressly licensed. This includes (but is by no means limited to) the following circumstances:

o 3.1 you provide the e-book to any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.2 you make the e-book available on bit-torrent sites, or are otherwise complicit in ‘seeding’ or sharing the e-book with any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.3 you print and distribute hard copies of the e-book to any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.4 you attempt to reverse engineer, bypass, alter, amend, remove or otherwise make any change to any copy protection technology which may be applied to the e-book.

* 4. By purchasing an e-book, you agree for the purposes of the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000 that Black Library may commence the service (of provision of the e-book to you) prior to your ordinary cancellation period coming to an end, and that by purchasing an e-book, your cancellation rights shall end immediately upon receipt of the e-book.

* 5. You acknowledge that all copyright, trademark and other intellectual property rights in the e-book are, shall remain, the sole property of Black Library.

* 6. On termination of this license, howsoever effected, you shall immediately and permanently delete all copies of the e-book from your computers and storage media, and shall destroy all hard copies of the e-book which you have derived from the e-book.

* 7. Black Library shall be entitled to amend these terms and conditions from time to time by written notice to you.

* 8. These terms and conditions shall be governed by English law, and shall be subject only to the jurisdiction of the Courts in England and Wales.

* 9. If any part of this license is illegal, or becomes illegal as a result of any change in the law, then that part shall be deleted, and replaced with wording that is as close to the original meaning as possible without being illegal.

* 10. Any failure by Black Library to exercise its rights under this license for whatever reason shall not be in any way deemed to be a waiver of its rights, and in particular, Black Library reserves the right at all times to terminate this license in the event that you breach clause 2 or clause 3.