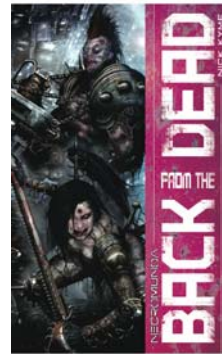


BACK FROM THE DEAD



A Necromunda novel

By Nick Kyme

When the deadly neurone plague sweeps the depths of the Necromundan Underhive turning its victims into mindless, flesh-eating zombies it falls to one man to stop the spread of the killer disease. Erik Bane is a down on his luck, drug addict, ex-enforcer whose promise to a street girl, Alicia, offers him a chance at redemption and throws him headlong into the crisis.

Against his will but seemingly driven by fate, Bane leads a group of desperate survivors through the ruins of the Underhive as he searches for Alicia all the while dodging the zombie horde and trying to stay alive long enough to figure out what caused the plague.

Bane has no idea that when he started this suicide mission it would have such strong connections with his past, a life he had all but given up on and a conspiracy that goes so deep uncovering will mean there's no going back for Bane...

About the Author

Nick Kyme hails from Grimsby, a small town on the east coast of England. Nick moved to Nottingham in 2003 to work on White Dwarf magazine as a Layout Designer. Since then, he has made the switch to the Black Library's hallowed halls as an editor and has been involved in a multitude of diverse projects. His writing credits include several published short stories, the background books *The Inquisition* and *Grudgelore*, and the Warhammer novel *Oathbreaker*.

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The hooded figure dogged his thoughts – slashes of colour through a narrow vision slit. Then Bane's world exploded into white fury as the gaoler exercised his brutality.

Erik Bane drew a ragged breath. With waking came pain. His head hurt so badly that he thought the pipe they had hit him with must have bent on impact. A tooth had been dislodged and the copper tang of blood filled his mouth. Tenderised and raw, he felt like he had been pounded on a meat-vendor's block.

His arms were a dead weight and Bane was vaguely aware they were suspended above him. Rubber hose bit into his wrists, binding them. The floor was cold against his bare feet. Numb, they were tucked beneath his legs. He was kneeling, his head slumped forward and his eyes closed in an ironic parody of a penitent man.

Though he could not open his eyes, Bane knew he was being held in a small utility chamber. The close confines of his cell exacerbated the stink of stale sweat and stagnant water. Directly above, a ruined moisture condenser dripped languidly. The deposits from the broken unit ran onto the ridges of his face and chilled his naked torso. A drop landed in Bane's eye. He blinked. Light flared, bright and angry. He shut his eyes, waiting for the painful afterimage to subside. It was a halogen lamp; he could hear the faint buzz of its power cell. Outside was a wall of silence. His captors usually

taunted, promising beatings and blood-duels; they were never silent. Something was wrong.

‘Hey!’ His voice was a choked rasp. ‘Hey!’ Louder this time, echoing off the metal cell interior. ‘Bastards, get this lamp out of my face. I’m awake.’

Silence answered. The sporadic drip of the moisture condenser seemed abruptly louder, almost maddening.

‘Are you scavving listening?’

Bane paused. He made out a dull machine noise, far off and muted by plascrete. His unease grew. The room became unbearable and he panicked. Struggling to his feet, he kicked at the door, thrusting his head forward.

‘Let me out,’ he cried, straining at his bonds. ‘You bastards,’ he screamed, his false bravado disintegrating. ‘Answer me.’

He thrashed back and forth until his head struck the halogen lamp and he sank to the ground, his hysteria exhausted. The lamp hit the floor and went out.

Outside, the persistent drone of the distant machinery mocked him.

In the darkness, he gasped foetid air. Opening his eyes, he saw a faint half-light issuing through the door slit. More light spilled through the gap where a hinge had been shot out. A large dent in the bottom left corner had not been there before. It was as if something big had been driven hard into it, almost forcing off the other hinge. Bane could kick it open. Free of his bonds, he could get out! Heart pumping, Bane arched his neck, ignoring the stiffness and pain. Eyes adjusting to the darkness, he saw the hose binding his wrists. A single length held them both, wound around a thick metal bolt jutting out of the wall. The dripping water had perished it slightly. Bane listened again for any sign of disturbance.

Nothing.

Bracing himself against the cold metal wall with his feet, Bane pushed. A sharp creak of rubber as the hose stretched, but it did not give. Torsion slammed him back into the wall. Head pounding from the effort, he breathed in and tried again. Mustering all his strength, Bane heaved until his face touched the vision slit. With the sound of rubber slapping metal, the hose split and snapped. Bane slumped forward and blacked out.

Blood seeping back into his arms woke him. They tingled and then burned, as sensation slowly returned. He tested his grip; weak, but it would do. Crawling back up onto his knees, Bane wondered how long he had been out.

Silence still endured.

Head heavy against a rusting side wall, more of Bane's memory started to return. Fragments at first, slices of sibilant non-sequiter punctuated by the ominous din of a slamming metal door – the sound that heralded another beating. He saw a girl's face. She was about sixteen. Almond shaped eyes seemed to pierce his soul, and the olive skin on her arms were marred by gang tats. One on her left cheek looked like a cattle brand.

'Alicia,' he gasped, and was abruptly alert. It was his botched rescue attempt that had got him here. But she had escaped. His last memory was of her running for the gate that he had opened with bolt croppers. If she'd made it to Former Glory, perhaps there was still a chance. The Razors had beaten him night and day for that information, it was the only reason they had kept him alive. They wanted her back real bad. He had held out though, bent but not broken. He had given them nothing. Now he had to find her.

Bane willed his body up. Using the shaft of light spilling through the door as a guide, he kicked the hinge. A spike of agony shot up his leg. He bit the exposed flesh of his arm to stop from crying out. Another kick. The same pain but this time the door shifted. Lathered in a veneer of sweat, he booted with the other leg and the door gave at last, rusted hinges cracking. A clang echoed through the darkened corridor as the door hit plascrete.

Exhausted, pain kept him moving. That and the desire to find Alicia. She needed him.

Damn it! Where had he told her to go? He was so hung-over he could not think. The Salvation, that was it.

'Get to The Salvation, it's a bar in Former Glory,' he had said. 'I'll find you.'

Had Bane faith, he would have prayed. Yet it was redemption he was looking for. As it was, he wished he had a drink to steel his courage. He could not lose Alicia. Not again.

He limped from his cell and was faced with a long, narrow corridor stretching out in front of him. Thick pipes ran its length on either side, corroded by moisture and age. Bloody marks stained the floor, left by his dragging feet after the blood-duels; brutal one-on-one, to the death battles between prisoners. He had killed six men down here. Six innocent men.

Overhead, raw halogen lamps hung at intervals from a networked cable array. Caked in filth they shed little light, but through the gloom he discerned two bodies.

The first was a few feet from the cell. Bane almost tripped over it. Head caved in, it looked like it had been used as a human battering ram, though he faced away from the door as if he had crawled on his belly. The bloody crevice in his skull was the fatal wound. Close-range, blunt force trauma

with a pick or axe. It spoiled a thick green mohican, jutting from an otherwise glabrous skull. He wore a torn leather jacket, sleeves ripped off at the shoulders. Gang tats covered his arms. The symbol of a black skull with a blade lodged in the forehead was most prominent.

It was the motif of the Razorheads, a house Goliath gang, the frikkers who had subjected Bane to who knows how many days and nights of torture in this hole. Other than that, he wore grey factory-issue fatigues and black steel-toed boots – nutcrackers.

Halfway down the corridor, its back against the wall, was another Razorhead corpse. Feet sticking out at impossible angles, his legs were obviously broken. Head shaved, a chain ran from his left nostril to his ear and into the back of his skull. He was similarly attired but only a thick chain crossed his otherwise naked torso, which was riddled by long, knotted scars. A stomach wound had killed him; something big, high calibre and close. It looked like the blast had tossed him into the wall, away from the exit ahead. Most of his chest was gone, leaving a gaping crimson void in its wake. Both bodies reeked of decay; they had been dead a while.

Bane stubbed his toe against something on the ground. It was a crowbar, probably dropped by one of the now-dead Goliaths. Bane picked it up and carried on. Bullet holes pockmarked the walls further down the corridor, shell casings and chipped plascrete crunched underfoot. No guns lying around though. With a gun he would need to be careful. Without one, if he met a live ganger, he was screwed.

Ahead the corridor branched to the right. A steel ladder ran up the wall on his left. It led to a hatch that could open onto the roof. He was not ready for a climb. Besides, up on the roof he would be completely exposed, so he pressed on

down the right branch. Walking became easier with each step. The movement in his muscles, however painful, was returning.

Another few feet of corridor, and he found a half open door. An upturned oil drum and some plastek packing crates made for a poor barricade. Blood stained the walls and floor. An impact spatter on the left side looked like it was from a head shot. Bane examined it. The blood was congealed, like whoever had been shot was already dead. No bodies though. Something had happened while he had been unconscious. A hit from a rival gang? Bane dismissed it instantly. The Razorheads had enemies for sure, but they were the most powerful gang in this part of the Underhive. No one could touch them. No, this was something else. Gripping the crowbar, Bane used it to rake a plastek crate aside. Then, as quietly as he could, he edged through the door.

Bane stood in a large square room. The sheer size made him feel small and vulnerable. The machine noise was louder in here. An overturned wooden table had spilled a deck of cards onto the lino flooring. Two stools lay nearby, one with its legs broken as if it had been used as a weapon. A bent mattress was crammed against the far wall, stained with sweat and blood. It faced a large holo-pict viewer, a downmarket 2D variant that spat white noise into the room.

Wan light crept in from the right, where an anteroom led off away from the wretched gloom. Opposite was another room, wreathed in darkness. In front was a closed door. Bane made for the right anteroom.

A sickly yellow glare from a single naked bulb threw shadows from where it hung in the ceiling. It revealed a wooden bench. Clamped to it were a rotary saw and a grinding block, a workshop of some sort. An empty tool chest

spilled its guts in the dark beneath the bench: a few rusty spanners, some nails, bolts and a bent screwdriver were all that remained. A cracked mirror was bolted roughly to the facing wall. Bane looked into it. A thin, dishevelled wretch looked back, eyes red-ringed and bloodshot, chin covered with white stubble. Ugly bruises, shallow cuts and red-raw burns ravaged his body. A roughly shaved head reflected the light. Burst capillaries were visible beneath the skin where it had been pinched by clamps, manifesting as dark, crimson wheals.

Averting his gaze, Bane noticed a stool in the corner. A white muscle-vest lay over the top and it propped up a shotgun. He pulled on the vest. With his skinny frame it was a good fit. Bane checked the shotgun, but it was empty and the barrel ruined. It had been left for fixing. There was nothing else of any use here, so he crossed the main room to the second antechamber.

He saw a small burning lamp on a scorched metal table. It was a narco-lab. It had been days since his last stim and he felt the sudden craving like a hammer-blow. Hands trembling, throat like ash, he licked his lips and searched the table. He found a scalpel, foil dishes, paper gauze and flare goggles. Raking them aside, he went through a set of drawers beneath with growing fervour. One was empty, barring some stub rounds – no good for the shot gun, so Bane ignored them. The second drawer was locked. With frantic abandon, he smashed it with the crowbar. There were plans inside, dome maps. He slumped against the table despairingly. He needed a fix, badly. He tried to focus, to think about Alicia. He got up and staggered back out, trying to pull himself together.

With regained composure came renewed fear. Where the hell was everyone? Bane opened the last door slowly and wished dearly he had a gun.

A vast work-yard, stretched out before him. As he entered, the machine noise grew louder and he realised this was where the noise was coming from. Two industrial-sized fans droned and whirred in eerie unison, kicking up a decaying stench in their blast drafts. Bane held his breath against the foetid air pumping into the room.

Only one half of the yard was visible, a faulty overhead strip light providing a flickering vista that hinted at more beyond the light's reach. A large gang motif was revealed by the stuttering light, daubed in red paint – the skull with the razor in its forehead. It covered most of the floor area. Fresh handprints overlaid it, darker than the paint.

Huge stone slabs delineated a body-building area. House Goliath valued brawn over brains, and the Razors were adherents to that tenet. The raw, muscle-temple of hulking weight benches, lift bars and punch sacks was a testament to that. A massive metal tri-frame dominated the space, bolted into the stone slabs. A sturdy pulley system was set at its apex and monstrous plascrete blocks were attached via steam-bolted chains. Whoever was capable of lifting it would be capable of crushing a man like he was styrene. Drawing closer, Bane saw a clutch of dumb bells at the foot of the tri-frame; one was coated in a veneer of gore and matter. He suppressed the urge to flee. He had to find a way out and the only way to do that was to stay calm.

Dismantled weapons were everywhere, lined up on ranks of tables. Racks of lasguns, stubbers and autoguns were in abundance. Those that were assembled were locked in metal cages. Belt-fed ammunition, solid rounds and power

packs, grenades and other munitions sat in piles. Moving closer, Bane saw large metal packing crates containing heavier weapons: rotary cannons, stubb-killers and other high-calibre arms. The Razors had been planning something big. They had enough firepower to lay siege to a city.

Bane tried to open one of the cages but the lock would not yield. It was high end security and a crowbar was not going to prevail. He doubted he could remember how to reassemble a lasgun or autogun. Even if he could, his trembling hands made that task impossible. He was wasting time. He had to get out.

He eyed the darkness warily, unwilling to stray into it. Closer to the edge, the stench grew stronger. Then he saw the power array. Fixed into a wall its sputtering wires cast tiny iridescent sparks into the darkness that fizzled and died as they struck the floor. Bane was no technician but he had seen enough to know a good, hard whack often got results. He struck the power array with the crowbar. With stuttering reluctance, a vast bank of strip lights lining the length of the work-yard came to life. As they did so, they revealed what the darkness had hidden. The entire Razorhead gang was here, all of them dead.

The scene was of a grisly massacre. At least fifty bodies stretched the width of the room. Two were slumped head first in a raised water sill that looked like it provided for the whole complex. Three more lay in the open, raked by bullet wounds, clutching knives and rusted cleavers in cadaverous fingers. Bane wandered tentatively into the carnage. Body piled on body greeted him as he moved slowly across the yard. Ahead were the outer walls of the Razorheads' lair, thick plascrete drilled by bullet holes and seared by las-burns. A chain-link gate bisected the wall in the

middle, crowned by coiling razor wire. Another body was entangled in it. It looked like he had been trying to climb over. Overlooking it was a makeshift watch tower. Whatever had killed these bastards would do for him too if it found him here. If the Razors could not kill it, he doubted a stim-addict with a crowbar could. He ran quickly to check the gate, covering his nose and mouth against the stink of death.

Locked.

He shook it hard but the chain was strong and looked new. What he would not give for some bolt-croppers. One of the corpses might have the key. He approached the nearest body. A gaping neck wound hung open like a second mouth, caused by what looked like a bite, with teeth marks that looked human. Bane forced the thought out of his mind and worked quickly. Patting the body down, he found nothing.

He moved to another. As he got nearer, he recognised him. Nagorn, the Razorheads' leader. They had met a long time ago. Thin strips of metal embedded in his forehead spelt his name. There were no obvious signs of his demise, but he was definitely dead. Lividity around the eyes and dilated pupils told their own story. The stench was overpowering. Bane retched before he could examine him. His heart leapt when he saw the key chain around Nagorn's neck, but his attention was drawn to something else. Tucked in the ganger's belt was a pistol; black, well-made with a gold fist insignia on the stock. It might have been a fine weapon once, but it was tarnished and in need of repair. Bane recognised it. It was an Enforcement service pistol. Only officers who gave twenty years service got one. It belonged to him. He reached over the corpse and took it, but as he pulled the weapon free he felt something twitch.

Nagorn was looking at him! Heart thundering in his chest, Bane shrank away as Nagorn sat up, reaching out to seize Bane's wrist. He tried to break free but the dead man's grip was strong. Bane aimed the pistol point-blank at Nagorn's chest, squeezing the trigger. Nothing happened. Age and neglect had rendered the weapon useless. The other corpses stirred, moaning balefully as they dragged their bodies up out of the dirt. Horrified, Bane lashed out with the crowbar as Nagorn lunged to bite him. The blow crushed the ganger's cheek, ripping off his jaw. A second blow broke his arm and, prising away the dead fingers, Bane hurried to his feet. Nagorn did not stay down, he lumbered upright unsteadily on twisted limbs, reaching out for Bane with dirt-encrusted claws.

Bane backed away, disbelieving. Another zombie got close, eyes wide, jaw slack. The flesh on its face had rotted away, revealing bone. Bane struck it with the crowbar, smashing the thing to its knees. A third was in front of him, its skull caved in. Bane battered it. Then another moved up, a gaping torso wound exposing black, putrefied innards. He cracked its skull with an overhand swipe and there was an audible crunch. Bane was tiring. His arms burned and he could not breathe in the miasma of decay. All the while the living dead shuffled closer, regarding him from around the work yard with malicious, hungry eyes.

Adrenaline fuelling his body, Bane ran urgently for the entry door. Those things blocked the gate and filled the yard – he had to go back.

Bane smashed the door aside as he bolted through it. The zombies converged on him, the promise of fresh meat driving them. Inside the large room, Bane dragged the mattress over to block the door he had come through.

Moments after he had rammed the mattress into place, a heavy impact made the door shudder. It popped open a few inches. Dead fingers reached around the crack. Bane kicked it shut, severing them. The holo-pict viewer hissed at him. Wrenching it from the wall, wires spitting sparks, he heaved it across the door.

Backing out of the room, Bane watched the door give. From the gloom beyond, the zombies pressed through the opening, two and three at a time; the mattress clawed aside, the holo-pict viewer crushed underfoot. Growing in vigour, they almost reached the next door before Bane could slam it.

He was back in the corridor. He kicked over drums and crates, launching one behind him in a vain effort to impede his pursuers. He barrelled around the corner, hearing the second door smash open. A wailing chorus of deep and terrifying groans came with it. In the long corridor he saw the ladder to the roof. He ran to it, limping. As he grabbed the first rung his leg was yanked back. The shaven-headed Razor he had left there snarled as it crawled toward him on its belly, tearing at his ankle. A bone crunching kick snapped the creature's neck and it lay still, releasing its grip. But the rest of the horde was almost upon him. Panting for breath, Bane pulled himself up the ladder, rung by painful rung. All the while, the corpse by the cell door lay dormant. Unable and unwilling to think on it further, Bane climbed madly, smashing the ceiling grill open with the crowbar. Heaving himself onto the roof, he took one last look below before shutting the hatch. Faces, deathly grey with rotten flesh and sunken eyes, glared back. They clawed at the air, snarling and moaning.

There was a freight elevator on the roof. Former Glory was ten kilometres away. He only hoped it reached that

far. As Bane hobbled over to it, the roof hatch was thrown open. The zombies came crawling forth, shambling towards him with even greater vigour.

Staggering inside the elevator, Bane raked the concertina door shut. He fell back as the first of the zombies hurtled into it, hissing curses and clawing through the slits in the gate. Then another came, and another, reaching, snarling. At this rate they would pound the gate down with sheer weight of numbers.

Beside him, a control panel hung down from a thick cable. There were only three operation symbols. Bane pressed the one to make the elevator go up. With a shriek of protesting servos and rusted gears, the elevator car began its grinding ascent. At first the creatures held on, the deathly pallor of their misshapen visages staring wildly. But as the car increased its speed they fell away, eerily silent, into the void below.

As the elevator rose, Bane tried to stop his heart hammering so loudly in his chest. He slid down the corrugated metal siding, fingers slipping off the controls as he sank to the floor. Foetid air washed over him, faster and faster as the car picked up speed. Operational warning lamps were a hazy amber blur. They cast intermittent slashes across Bane's face. The steady thwump of the rising elevator car filled his senses. On his back the twinkling lights of uphive were like dying stars.

Exhausted, he drifted into unconsciousness.

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