

# NECROMUNDA OUTLANDER

IN THE FUTURISTIC hive city of Necromunda, from the top of the hive spire to the very depths of the underhive, there is only one rule: survival of the fittest. Brutal gangs prowl the darkness, hideous mutants and unspeakable monsters lurk in the forgotten and lonely places. For the enterprising mercenary, a respectable living can be made. But be warned: allies become enemies all too quickly when the ultimate prize is survival itself...



When a stranger arrives in the settlement of Fall Sands, he soon attracts the attention of the ruling gang. Sensing that the stranger is more than just a drifter, gang leader Lakatos soon learns that the man has some very useful forgery skills. But the stranger has a hidden agenda and the only thing on his mind is revenge!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Matt Keefe** has worked extensively in the movie and games industries and was one of the developers who worked on the latest edition of the *Necromunda* game. He lives in Sheffield, England.

*More storming action from Necromunda*

SALVATION  
C S Goto

SURVIVAL INSTINCT  
Andy Chambers

JUNKTION  
Matthew Farrer

The following is an excerpt from *Outlander* by Matt Keefe.

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‘WHAT BUSINESS?’ SAID Erket, slamming his tankard on to the bar as a sign of his growing impatience. Secretly, Erket had little stomach for the filthy slop it contained, least of all at the height of Ash Season, and hoped that a little might spill out over the sides and spare him the hurt of drinking it, or the indignity of leaving it unfinished. And slop out it did, though no one would have noticed amongst the puddles of filth that already covered the slime-encrusted, buckled old stanchion that served as a bar.

The stranger showed no such impatience or lack of stomach, calmly knocking back his Wildsnake, taking one last puff on his toxstick and raising his hat just enough to scratch the scalp beneath before turning to the impertinent juve.

‘My business,’ the stranger answered at last. He was as calm as Erket was impetuous.

Erket’s rage flared instantly. His blood boiled and his face turned a furious red. If Erket had yet proven himself worthy to wear the full mask of a Cawdor, he might have hidden his face, and with it his growing rage. As it was, his skin painted an angry red halo around the black leather mask that covered his face around the eyes, and it was clear to all, not least this implacable stranger, that Erket was losing his temper.

It had been barely an hour since the stranger had arrived in Fall Sands, strolling out of the ash storms as though it was a clear day in the Spire. Already the entire town was abuzz with talk of the stranger, as mad or as brave as he must have been to risk the storms, alone and unaided.

Whilst others gossiped in doorways, Erket resolved to take a rather more direct route. So it was that he had found the stranger holed up in the Pipe Under Mile, Fall Sand’s only watering hole and, as Erket saw it, a place this stranger had no right to be.

'And what business is that, outlander?' said Erket, calmer than before. It cut at his pride to stay cool in the face of this arrogant outlander but he was slowly beginning to realise that his failing temper just might be exactly what the stranger wanted. Still, he was livid inside. Here was Erket, and here was this nameless nobody who thought he could defy him. *Him*. Erket. Erket of the Union. The Union ruled this town, and in Erket's mind, that meant *he* ruled the town, and he wasn't about to let some wandering fool challenge that.

The stranger said nothing. His toxstick had gone out since he last drew on it, and he concentrated on relighting it. As he raised the small, sparking slate towards its tip, Erket snapped and smacked the stranger's hand down, knocking the thumb-sized slate to the floor where it burned up in a phosphor green flash.

That was enough. The stranger was on his feet and in Erket's face in the blink of an eye. His right hand clutched the collar of Erket's robe, pulling it so tight around his throat that Erket could utter only an undignified gag where he had aimed for a furious curse. The stranger's left hand flashed up to Erket's face and wrenched the little mask off in an instant, meeting the frightened juve's gaze with his own.

'Now see here, little man,' said the stranger. 'My business is my business, and till I go asking you about yours, I reckon things are gonna stay that way. You got me?' Everything the stranger said was measured, calm, and impossibly menacing. Erket writhed, but the stranger's gnarled hand just tightened its grip, choking Erket and leaving him with no choice but to nod weakly and raise his hands in submission.

The stranger released him at once, sending the cowardly Erket plunging down on to one knee before he regained his balance, narrowly avoiding an embarrassing fall onto his backside. The leather mask fell from the stranger's hand and landed at Erket's feet, forcing yet another undignified stoop, then another as the nervous little juve first fumbled his mask before finally snatching it up in his terrified white fingertips.

The stranger just settled back down onto his stool, drawing deeply on the toxstick pressed between his lips. It was lit again somehow, though Erket could swear the slate had never

touched it.

Erket staggered backwards, pulling the mask back on to restore his anonymity, if not his dignity. Behind him, the others were already on their feet, closing in on the scuffle, and Erket stopped with a jolt as he backed into the tall, muscular Lakatos.

‘What’s going on?’ said Lakatos.

Erket cowered and wriggled out of the way, perching himself behind Lakatos’s shoulder, without the nerve to answer the question. His leader could deal with the stranger.

The crowd that gathered around the outlander was vast. The watering hole was full, and it seemed almost everyone knew Erket while no one knew the stranger. The Pipe Under Mile was quite literally that, a section of collapsed pipe with a raft of fallen debris as a roof, so that it had no walls but rather a single circular exterior formed by the pipe itself. With the huge crowd surrounding the stranger, the little circular building took on the appearance of an arena more than a simple watering hole.

The Union was here to a man – a dozen of Erket’s Cawdor brothers and all the pistols, shivs and garrottes they could hide about their persons. Erket sneered viciously from his hiding place behind Lakatos. Now that damned outlander was going to get it.

‘What’s going on?’ Lakatos said again as he cast his glance directly at Erket. Erket had yet to master his cowardice and eventually it was the stranger who answered.

‘Seems your friend has a problem with a man enjoying a little Wildsnake in a storm,’ said the stranger, not even bothering to rise from his stool or turn and face Lakatos.

Silence reigned for a few moments before Lakatos sat himself down on the stool recently vacated by Erket and gestured for two more Wildsnakes. By rights, even for the Cawdor to be there was a sin, but with the claustrophobic terror of the ash storms playing on their minds, well, sin was virtually medicinal. The bartender clutched both bottles in one hand as he skimmed the lids from them with the edge of his knife before planting them down firmly in front of the burly Cawdor leader. Lakatos passed one of the Wildsnakes to the

stranger and Erket's heart sank, torn by a mixture of disappointment and anger while his face betrayed his utter bemusement. Why wasn't the stranger getting what he deserved?

'I just asked him his business,' protested the confused Erket. Lakatos ignored him entirely.

'Well, never mind my friend,' said Lakatos, keeping his gaze fixed on the stranger. 'We don't have a problem with you getting your Wildsnake, Emperor judge us all,' he said, covering his own sins with the hasty admonition.

'What we got a problem with, is your face. We ain't seen it round here before,' he continued, raising the glass bottle to his lips while awaiting a reply.

There was still no sign of emotion on the outlander's face as he turned to face Lakatos.

'Well there's a thing, 'cos I ain't seen your face at all,' he said, drawing attention to the black leather mask that covered every inch of Lakatos's face. Combined with his dark robes, heavy breeches and worn leather gloves, Lakatos was a creature upon whom not an inch of flesh was visible. He was perfect, thought Erket.

In another bar, such quick wit would have brought raucous applause, but here it brought the most expectant of silences. The Union's gangers pressed nearer while the bar's other patrons flitted nervous glances towards the stranger and then towards the door, hurriedly averting their gaze if they caught his eye, or those of the assembled Cawdor.

The silence prevailed just long enough for Lakatos to finish his Wildsnake and return the bottle to the bar with a delicate clinking noise that ushered in the briefest of commotions.

The circular crowd broke into chaos as two of the Cawdor gangers, Durn and Rubik, dashed forwards and grabbed the stranger by the shoulders. He rose instantly from his stool to meet them, his fists in their stomachs as if about to fling off their grasps. Before he could do any such thing, a dagger was pressed to his throat, brandished by a third onrushing ganger, Antal, while two more pointed their rather decrepit looking autopistols at his head from where they stood at the edge of the crowd.

Erket grinned. Now this was what he wanted to see.

But this outlander was no fool. Against such overwhelming odds he simply slumped back down onto his stool, his shoulders still in the vicelike grip of the two Cawdor heavies, the dagger still held firmly against his throat and the pistols still trained right on him. He put up no fight as the two gangers wrenched the long, tattered coat from his shoulders and clamped his arms behind his back.

Erket was delirious with glee. That stranger had cost him in front of his betters in the Union, and now he was going to get payback. Cocky as only a juve could be, Erket stepped out from behind Lakatos and strolled right up to the stranger, knocking his hat from his head with a single swipe of his hand. Erket laughed and pressed his face close to the stranger's, sneering viciously.

It was only now that he got a good look at him. With his broad-brimmed hat and long, dark coat, the stranger was almost as well covered as a Cawdor. Erket had mistaken him for thin, lanky. He was indeed tall, but the long sweep of his coat had hidden broad shoulders and a powerful frame. Three identical tubes emerged from his flesh just below the jawbone before disappearing into ugly, scabrous bionic ports in his chest, and his left eye was bionic too. The enhancements were certainly the worse for wear, but they were clearly well made, not some makeshift, Underhive bodge jobs.

The dark ochre of the stranger's skin coupled with his gnarled, stubbly features did much to hide the grime that covered his flesh, giving him a ruddy rather than dirty appearance, something with which all these mysterious outlanders seemed blessed – the ability to wear the inescapable dirt and grime of the Underhive like a carefully crafted badge of office. His lips and nostrils were covered in a fine layer of the toxic grey ash from the storms raging outside, though Erket presumed from the tubes emanating from the stranger's throat that a mouthful of the stuff would do him little harm.

Most obvious of all was the stranger's lack of any visible weapon, a sure sign of a hidden device on him somewhere. Erket stepped forwards and, while Durn and Rubik held him firmly, began to search the stranger. Sure enough, the small of

his back hid a pistol, held in place by one of the half dozen fibrous chords that bound what appeared to be a once-resplendent breastplate on to his torso.

The armour was badly worn, and the right side was missing entirely while in many other places individual patches hung at odd angles, evidence of hasty, makeshift repairs. Nonetheless, the armour was clearly of a calibre higher than Erket had ever seen before. Behind him Lakatos squinted, viewing the stranger with the same curiosity as Erket.

Erket pulled the pistol from its hiding place. A bolt pistol: a heavy, shell-firing device, again a rarity, though nothing Erket hadn't seen before. He glanced back at his leader to see Lakatos's own bolt pistols displayed proudly in the holsters at his hips.

Erket dropped the clip and inspected the weapon. It seemed in perfect condition. It took much of the Union's wealth and resources for Lakatos to maintain his brace of pistols, so for the outlander to keep just a single bolt pistol in working order was no mean feat. Erket thought for a second about taking this example for himself, though Lakatos's stern glare made him think better of it. He passed the bolt pistol to Lakatos before rifling through the assortment of pockets that covered the stranger's trousers.

Erket could find little of interest in the pockets (not even the spare sparkslate he was sure would explain that damned burning toxstick) but as he patted his hands against the stranger's boot, he narrowly avoided a concealed dagger sheathed in the leather. Erket pulled his hand away on instinct, just as the handle and three inches of exposed blade popped from their sheath with a telltale *hiss*. Pleased with himself and his find, Erket took the blade by the handle and whipped it out of its hiding place, waving it menacingly in the stranger's face before breaking into a deep belly laugh. Lakatos could keep the fancy pistol, thought Erket. This dagger would do just fine as a memento of the soon to be dead outlander who had dared cross him. Erket pushed the knife down inside the top of his own boot, stood, and returned to his vantage point behind Lakatos.

'This isn't all he's carrying,' said Lakatos. 'A bionic eye like

that is trained to a sight, and this pistol doesn't have one. He's hiding something.' Lakatos gestured at the stranger's bionic eye with the butt of the gun Erket had earlier taken from the outlander. Lakatos weighed the pistol in his hand for a moment longer before stuffing it under his own belt and stepping forward to where the stranger sat. Reaching him, Lakatos ripped the stranger's coat sleeves clean off his arms with a single mighty yank.

Sure enough, an elaborate harness on the inside of the man's forearm housed a second pistol, a mere stub gun, yet this one did indeed sport a laser sight, no doubt the one Lakatos was sure must be relayed directly to the bionic eye. Erket could feel the triumph of his find slipping away from him, and cursed himself for not searching the stranger more thoroughly, though he was too much of a fool to be angry at his own negligence and cursed the stranger instead.

Another ganger, Berzel, stepped forward from the crowd and plucked the pistol from its harness before inexpertly attempting to remove the harness from the stranger's arm, a task he quickly abandoned, leaving the harness hanging by a tangled mess of cord, half-disassembled with latches, bolts and springs falling from it as evidence of Berzel's ineptitude. The patter of their fall was the only noise in the otherwise deathly silent Pipe.

Lakatos, meanwhile, was meticulous. He had the stranger's coat spread out on the bar and searched it with a thoroughness that only made Erket even angrier with the damned outlander who had made such a spectacle of him, and in front of his gang no less.

Lakatos's search yielded a handful of parchments, though none of them seemed to grab his attention and he tossed them casually into a pile beside him on the bar.

'Just kill him,' yelled Erket. He was the only one stupid enough to shout such a thing, but it was clear that most of the assembled Cawdor were thinking pretty much the same thing.

'No,' said Lakatos, coolly stopping and turning to face Erket. 'A man needs a pretty good reason, or a real big problem, to venture out in Ash Season, and I want to know what



it is.' Lakatos glared at the stranger who dipped his head and aimed his gaze at the floor, remaining staunchly silent.

That much was true, thought Erket. It was a good three days walk through the storms from the nearest settlement; a week's walk from the nearest settlement that wasn't under Cawdor control. How the outlander had survived so long out there alone was something Erket couldn't fathom, though in truth he didn't much care.

Lakatos carried on searching the coat, drawing a dagger and ripping the garment's seams open just in case its lining hid anything of interest.

Then he stopped.

Lakatos stared at the pile of discarded parchments for a moment, dropped the jacket and reached over and brushed the top three or four parchments out of the way. He snatched up the particular sheet that had caught his eye. In flinging it to the bar, Lakatos had accidentally dropped the parchment into a foul smelling puddle of liquid, probably the same filth Erket had cunningly spilled from his tankard earlier. The right-hand side of the parchment was soaking, and where the liquid ran it revealed something most surprising.

The surface of the parchment looked like nothing more than a plain old grant of passage, a simple docket the stranger had used some time in the past to cross, in this case, Orlock territory without difficulty. But the slop revealed another layer, hidden beneath the writing on the surface, and this was what caught Lakatos's eye. He dragged the parchment through the puddle of spilled liquor, dousing the rest of the parchment to reveal the entire inscription.

It was a chart of some sort, a ledger with what appeared to be designation codes scribbled in the left-hand column, with a series of ticks, crosses and numerals filling the columns that ran out across the rest of the page.

Lakatos snatched up Erket's half-full tankard from where it stood on the bar, and the juve breathed a sigh of relief as Lakatos poured its contents unceremoniously over the entire pile of parchments. His leader had disposed of the filthy stuff and spared Erket from drinking it without him having to suffer the indignity of refusing it.

Lakatos flicked through the pile, tearing many of the sodden parchments in his imprecise, leathery grip. He tossed many of them aside, but two more parchments revealed the same hidden layer as the first. One of these was another ledger while the second took the form of an intricate diagram Erket couldn't make out from his poor vantage point. Lakatos snatched up the magic parchments in his fist and turned to face the stranger.

The stranger looked up, his good eye blinking a little faster than normal, but his bionic eye remained still and he showed no other signs of nervousness, even now that Lakatos had apparently chanced upon his hidden cargo.

'What are these?' asked Lakatos, striding up close to the stranger.

'I don't know,' he said. 'I'm just the courier.'

Lakatos allowed himself a faint chuckle. Erket marched forward and parked himself right behind his leader, peering over his shoulder. This time, his voice was just a whisper.

'Let's kill him. We don't need him. I bet we can sell these things for a fortune. Come on, let me finish him, boss.'

'I don't think so,' said Lakatos. 'He's got a fancy bolt pistol, but a busted up little stubber with a laser sight on it. That's quite a thing to do, to put a sight on a battered weapon' said Lakatos, beginning to pace in circles round and round the still restrained stranger.

'Even if you were just the courier, someone like you doesn't come cheap. These must be real important, don't you think?' Lakatos waved the parchments beside the stranger's face, trying to frighten him with the sudden noise from behind.

'Maybe they are.' The stranger still held his nerve. He didn't let his eyes wander, and even as Lakatos paced behind him, he kept his gaze fixed dead ahead. 'I wouldn't know. I just carry 'em.'

'But real important to who? Where were you going?' asked Lakatos. 'That's what bothers me. This place isn't on the way to anywhere, and you don't seem like somebody who got lost in the storm. There's more to you, outlander, isn't there?' Lakatos's intimidating black mask came within an inch of the stranger's cold, hard stare. 'Much more, I think.'

Lakatos raised himself to his full height, and with a casual flick of his gloved fingers he gestured to Durn and Rubik, their hands still clamped down on the stranger's shoulders like ripper jacks to a kill. For a second, Erket was sure his leader had just given the signal to kill the stranger, and he snarled in delight, though he was disappointed that he couldn't do it himself. Then, once more, the juve's tumultuous temper raced skyward as he realised Lakatos's real intention.

Durn and Rubik released their grip on the stranger and stepped back. The stranger took a moment to roll his shoulders in their sockets, working off the stiffness of the past few minutes' detention. Then he rose from his stool and stood to face Lakatos.

'You know what amazes me the most?' said Lakatos rhetorically. 'Just because a man has reason enough, is desperate enough, to try his luck out in the ash storms, doesn't mean he's going to make it.'

The stranger seemed to be paying little attention to Lakatos. Instead his foot slid across to where his hat lay on the floor. He slid his toe under the rim and kicked it hard upwards. Several of the Cawdor gave a start. Pistols were raised back to aim on the stranger's head and daggers came forth from their sheaths while many of the bar's other patrons dived for cover.

Not so Lakatos and the stranger. Both remained implacable. The stranger's hand flashed out to his side, catching his hat by the brim and flicking it back onto his head with a single motion. Lakatos raised his hand and signalled to his gangers to lower their weapons. The stranger's gamble had done little to shake Lakatos but, as Erket gazed around the room, it was clear that fear was the only thing holding back many of the other gangers' trigger fingers.

'What amazes me,' said Lakatos confidently, 'is that you came here at all, that you made it here, especially when, well... when...' Lakatos's voice trailed off. He was playing with his audience, confident he had solved this stranger's riddle. At last he continued.

'These stormy days are unpleasant,' said Lakatos, a wry smile forming on his face. The other members of the Union gazed at each other half in shock, half in fear.

‘Yes,’ said the stranger, emotionless, but with a hint of a question in his voice. ‘For strangers to travel...’

Erket cursed and without realising it stamped his foot to the ground in rage. He could hardly remember the password at the best of times – something Lakatos reminded him of frequently – and here was this damned outlander. How could he know the password? He wasn’t one of them, he couldn’t be. Erket was sure he couldn’t be.

Lakatos obviously thought otherwise. Erket grimaced as Lakatos broke into a broad grin and slapped the stranger firmly on the back, clutching his arm warmly with his other hand and leading him out of the watering hole like a friend who had not passed this way in years. Berzel, Morden and the others rushed up to the stranger, thrusting his pistol and the tattered pile of parchments back into his hands, eager to appease him. Many patted him on the back, just like Lakatos had done, welcoming him warmly where minutes ago they would have thought nothing of slitting his throat.

Erket turned and spat on the floor as he watched the boisterous crowd leave the watering hole, the stranger in their midst. Damn that stranger, he thought. Damn that outlander.

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