

# ***RAVENOR***

*The first Ravenor novel*

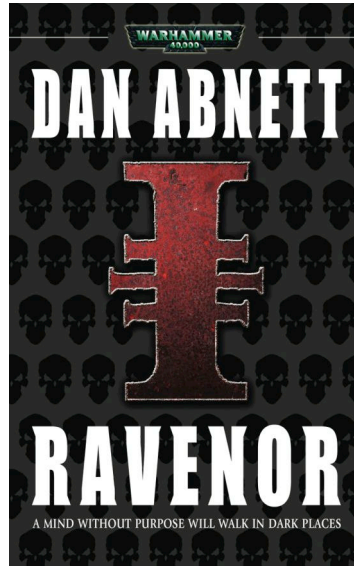
*By Dan Abnett*

When his body is hideously damaged in an enemy attack, it looks as though Inquisitor Gideon Ravenor's promising career would be abruptly brought short. Now, encased in a life-support system that keeps him alive but forever cuts him off from the physical world, Ravenor utilises his formidable mental powers to continue his investigations. Along with his retinue of warriors and assassins, Gideon Ravenor fights to protect an Imperium he can no longer see, hear or feel.

Best-selling author Dan Abnett expands the story first begun in his Eisenhorn trilogy with this galaxy-spanning tale of espionage, intrigue and all-out action.

## **About the Author**

Dan Abnett lives and works in Maidstone, Kent, in England. Well known for his comic work, he has written everything from the Mr Men to the X-Men in the last decade. His work for the Black Library includes the popular strips Lone Wolves, Titan and Darkblade, the best-selling Gaunt's Ghosts novels, and the acclaimed Inquisitor Eisenhorn trilogy.



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(with Andy Hoare)

The following is an excerpt from *Ravenor* by Dan Abnett.  
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IT STARTED TO RAIN. A brisk westerly had thickened the cloud cover over the district, and precipitation alarms fixed to the street posts began to bleat.

Carl Thonius didn't seem to hear them, so she pulled him by the elbow and gestured towards the cover of the tintglas walkway.

'I hate this frigging planet,' he said.

Two dozen centuries of dirty industry had poisoned the atmosphere of Eustis Majoris. Ninety per cent of the time, the immense city-state of Petropolis stewed under a roof of toxic stain cloud, its streets choked with hydrocarbon smog. Every now and then, the clouds burst and drenched the surface quarters with acid rain. The rain ate into everything: stone, tiles, brick, steel, skin. Epidermal cancer, a by-product of exposure to the rain, was the planet's second biggest killer behind pollutant-related emphysemas.

The moment the rain-burn alarms started to sound, gampers flocked out of alleyways and sink shops and began loudly offering their services to passers-by. Each one flamboyantly unfurled the long stemmed, telescoping umbrella he carried over his shoulder like a spear. Some gamps were treated paper, others steel-silk or plastek or cellulose. Almost all had been hand-painted in eye-catching ways and inscribed with details concerning hourly rates and the gamper's unimpeachable character.

The two off-worlders shooed them away and kept themselves under the walkway. They could hear the corrosive rain pattering on the tintglas, and sizzling on the open flags of the street.

Carl Thonius kept a linen handkerchief clamped coyly over his nose and mouth. He had soaked it in oil of osscil. There had been a look of fastidious distaste on his face since the moment they had arrived on the surface.

‘You look like a complete pussy,’ Patience Kys told him, not for the first time.

‘I don’t know how you can begin to suffer this foul air,’ he replied scornfully. ‘Every breath brings a lungfull of pestilential filth. It is quite the most loathsome frigging arsehole of a planet I have ever known.’

Thonius was a man of unremarkable stature but remarkable poise. He stood or walked or sat just so – always with a perfect mix of elegance and composure. An ankle turned thus, an elbow crooked. He was dressed in a red velvet suit that screamed of good tailoring, with expensive, black buckle-shoes and white lace cuffs, and a mantle-slicker of oxidised grey plastek. He was twenty-nine years old, standard. His heavy blond hair was brushed back off his high forehead and he had dusted his face with white foundation. With the pasty pallor and the kerchief to his nose, he looked like a classical school statue – ‘Gentleman about to sneeze’.

‘Pussy,’ she repeated. ‘Reminds me of home.’ Patience Kys had been born on Sameter in the Helican sub: another dirty, smoggy, deluged hab-stacked world. The Imperium was full of them.

They made an odd couple. The dandy and the vixen. Taller than him, athletically slender, she walked with an exaggeratedly casual roll that seemed to slide her along the pavement. Her chocolate-brown bodyglove was detailed with scales of silver and left nothing to the imagination except the risks involved. Her black hair was coiled up in a tight chignon secured by two long silver pins, and her face was pale and angular. Her eyes were green.

‘Lost him,’ she admitted.

Thonius glanced at her and cocked a plucked eyebrow. ‘The blue one,’ he said.

‘And how can you tell?’

The walkway and street before them was a bobbing sea of gamps in the downpour. In the midst of them, a blue one stood out.

‘No markings. No inscriptions or hourly rates. He’s rich. He doesn’t use a public gamper. He has his own man.’

‘The stuff you know...’ she mocked. ‘Though you’re still a pussy.’

Thonius snorted, but he didn’t deny it. Anyone shy of an Adeptus Astartes in full Terminator plate was a pussy compared to Patience Kys.

They moved through the midday crowd, following the blue shade. It was morbidly fascinating to see how many pedestrians around them had skin burns. Some old and faded, some raw and new. Some – and Carl Thonius pressed his fragrant kerchief tighter still – no longer burns, but discolouring into lethal melanomas. The received remedy was faith paper. You could buy it from street corner vendors and stalls in the sink-shop arcades. Tissue-thin and gummed, it had been blessed by various ecclesiarchy somebodies and infused with palliative serums like thistle, milkroot and flodroxil. You cut it to shape – usually into little patches – moistened it, and stuck it to your rain-burns. Faith, and the God-Emperor of Mankind, did the rest. The civilians around them were speckled with faith paper patches. One old man had his entire neck and forehead wrapped in it, like papier-mâché.

A whirring sound passed over them through the lethal rainfall. Kys looked up in time to see a flock of birds turn overhead and dart as one up into the high reaches of a city spire, hazed by the drizzle.

‘How do they live?’ she wondered aloud.

‘They don’t,’ said Thonius.

She didn’t know what he meant, but she didn’t care. It was too miserable for a Carl Thonius lecture.

At the crossroads on Lesper Street, the blue gamp turned left and bobbed away down the wide boulevard of St Germanicus into the ceramicists’ quarter. The rain continued to hiss down.

‘Where’s he going now?’ she muttered.

‘It’s his only vice. He collects klaylware.’

‘Not his only vice,’ she ventured.

Thonius nodded. ‘The only one he admits to.’

Under iron awnings and heavy jalousie blinds, the artisans and dealers of the quarter had set out their wares on wooden stalls. Blue gamp lingered around those that displayed bowls and vases of a fat-lipped, heavy style, with rich earthy colours and gleaming glazes.

‘They say he has the finest collection of antique klaylware in Formal B,’ Thonius said.

‘You say that like it’s something to be proud of. Or even something that makes sense,’ Kys said. ‘I’m getting bored, Carl. Let’s slam him.’

‘No. We’ll never get his guard down if we push him. He’s far too clever for that.’

‘His orientation is hetero, isn’t it?’

Thonius paused and looked at her. ‘That’s what the briefing notes said. Why?’

She pulled him by the arm and fast-walked him until they were well ahead of the blue gamp. It was hesitating around another pot-monger’s storefront.

‘Kys? What are—’

‘Shut up. He’ll be here in a few minutes.’ She gestured to the ceramics display of the shop nearby. ‘This place any good?’

‘I... uh... yes, I think so. Some fine quality pieces from the late third era.’

‘Pick me something.’

‘What?’

‘You know this stuff. Because you’re a pussy. Now pick me something. The choicest thing they have.’

UMBERTO SONSAL, SECOND director of the Engine Imperial manufactory in Formal B, was an unpleasantly portly man with soft, full lips and lidless eyes. The rain alarms had stopped – the downpour had abated – and as he approached the ceramics shop he adjusted the dial of his signet ring. The anti-acid scales that had loricated his skin retracted into the slit pockets behind his ears and under his eyebrows. His personal gamper furlled the wide blue rain-shield.

Sonsal dabbed his forehead with a lace handkerchief and wandered in between the rows of shelves, occasionally pausing to lift and examine a particular piece. His assistant, his shaver and his two bodyguards waited in the doorway of the shop.

The dish on the third shelf was particularly exquisite. No more than late third, perfect in all dimensions, and with a sought-after crackling to the glaze. He was about to reach in and lift it up, when a hand came and scooped it away.

‘Oh, so beautiful,’ murmured the girl as she held the piece up to the light.

‘It is,’ he said, his voice a rich whisper.

‘I’m sorry. Were you about to look at it?’ she asked.

She was stunning. Her eyes so green, her slender form so striking, her love of klaylware so evident.

‘Be my guest,’ Sonsal said.

She turned the piece expertly in her hands, noting the maker’s stamp on the base, and the little disc of paste-paper showing the import serial.

‘Late third?’ she mused, casting a glance at him.

‘Indeed.’

‘And the stamp. It looks like Nooks Workshop, but I think in fact it might be Solobess, before Nooks bought him out.’

She held the piece out to him. He patted his fat lips and blinked. ‘I would concur. You know your ware.’

‘Oh no!’ she said hastily, smiling an intoxicatingly fleeting smile. ‘Not really. I just... I just like what I like.’

‘You have extraordinary taste... Miss?’

‘Patience Kys.’

‘My name is Sonsal, but I would be pleased if you called me Umberto. Patience, your eye is excellent. Will you purchase the item? I recommend you do.’

‘I’m afraid I can’t stretch to something like this. Really, Umberto, my dabbling is confined to appreciation for the most part. I have a few pieces, but I seldom have the capital to buy.’

‘I understand. Does anything else take your eye?’

+THONIUS!+

The call-thought hit him between the eyes like a flung brick. He was on the other side of the street, observing from the awning-covered shop front of a faith paper vendor. Fuming water from the seared roofs shuddered down the old, iron gutter pipes nearby. Thonius cranked up the magnification of his pocket scope.

+Quickly now. Something good!+

‘Are you seeing this?’ Thonius asked. He received an assurance, far softer and quieter than Kys’s crude mind-jab.

‘Suggestions?’ Thonius said.

He listened to the reply and then said, ‘Just to your left, the wide-mouthed urn. No, Kys, your other left. There. The brown one. It’s early fourth, but the maker’s a good one. Marladeki. It’s favourable because the proportions are especially good, and Marladeki died young, so his output wasn’t huge.’

+How young?+

‘I’ll ask. How young? Uh huh. Patience... he died at twenty-nine. Made mainly bowls. An urn is rare.’

+The stuff you know. Okay.+

‘THIS IS NICE,’ Kys said, stroking her hand around the rim of a tall wine flask that had been finished with an almost treacle-black glaze. ‘But this...’

She feigned a sigh as she picked up the wide-mouthed urn ever so gently. ‘Glory, this is a fine piece. Early fourth, I’d say... but what do I know?’

Sonsal took it from her, his eyes as much on her as the urn. ‘You know plenty, my dear. Early fourth. Who is the maker now? I can’t quite make out the stamp...’

Sonsal fixed a delicate jeweller’s lens to his right eye and examined the urn’s base.

Kys shrugged. ‘It couldn’t possibly be Marladeki, could it? I mean... he made so few objects that weren’t bowls.’

Sonsal put his eyepiece away and turned the urn over in his hands.

‘It is,’ he said, softly.

‘No!’

‘By the God-Emperor, Patience, I’ve been looking for a piece like this for years! I’d have passed it over as a fake but for you.’

‘Oh, come now,’ she said with a diffident shrug. The man was loathsome. It was damn hard to remain civil, let alone play the part.

‘I must have it,’ Sonsal said, then glanced at her. ‘Unless you...?’

‘Far and away out of my price range, Umberto,’ she demurred.

Sonsal held the piece up and the storekeeper hurried forward to take it, wrap it and write out the bill of sale.

‘I am indebted to you, Patience,’ Sonsal said.

‘Don’t be silly, Umberto.’

‘Would you... would you do me the pleasure of being my guest for dinner this evening?’

‘I couldn’t possibly—’

‘I insist. To celebrate this acquisition. Really, Patience, it’s the least I could do to acknowledge its finder... and how could you be so cruel as to deprive me of a supper with a woman of such extraordinary good taste?’

‘Umberto, you really are too sweet.’

‘BY THE THRONE, he’s disgusting,’ Thonius muttered. ‘Great golden throne, you’re such a whore, Kys.’

+Shut up, pussy.+

‘Just be careful, Patience. Just be careful.’

THE RAIN-BURN ALARMS had begun to sing again. As Sonsal’s party moved away up the street, his gamper opened the blue umbrella and Sonsal and Patience sheltered beneath it together.

‘Yes, I’m watching them,’ Thonius said tartly, in response to the nudge in his head. He was tailing the blue gamp. ‘I’ll stay with her, don’t worry. If Kara or Nayl are free maybe—’

Nudge.

‘Oh, both of them busy? Very well. I can handle this. Yes, I can handle this. I said so, didn’t I?’

Nudge.

‘Good. Relax, Ravenor. I am ever your servant.’

GOD DAMNED NINKER was going for it.

The reach into the jacket. Always a giveaway. What had he got? A snub? A slide-away? A frigging bolter?

Kara Swole didn’t wait around to find out. She turned a back flip and let a hand-spring carry her over the brushed-steel service counter.

Shots slammed into the heated racks above her, throwing trays of braised meat and steamed veg-mash into the air. Wax jars of preserved fish and pickled cabbage burst and sprayed their noxious contents down the rear of the counter. Someone was screaming. Probably the waitress with the stupendous rack, Kara decided. Let her scream. She had the lungs for it, evidently.

Kara ran along on all fours, quick as a felid, and popped the top three buttons of her waistcoat, allowing access to the shoulder rig she was wearing. The flatnose Tronvasse compact virtually fell out into her waiting hand. At the end of the service counter, she sat down on her bottom, her back to the warm steel, and racked the gun’s slide.

The shooting had ceased for a second. All she could hear were the yells and howls of the patrons flooding for the exits.

‘Where is he?’ she whispered, testily.

+Five metres to your left, coming forward. A sense of high anxiety about him.+

‘No crap. He’s just drawn down on me. High anxiety doesn’t even begin to cover it.’

+Please be careful. It would be expensive to replace you.+

‘You’re all heart.’

+I was about to add... we don’t want the trouble. Not here. Too many complications. Can you defuse?+

‘Defuse?’

+Yes.+

‘A maniac with a gun?’

+Yes.+

‘Let’s see...’

She raised her head slightly. Two more shots nearly scalped her as they came whining over the counter top.

‘That’s a no.’

+Um.+

‘Look, I can try. Let me see, would you?’

+Close your eyes.+

Kara Swole shut her eyes. After a moment, a clear, slightly fish-eyed vision appeared to her. The service parlour of a dingy public dining house, as seen from somewhere up near the ceiling vents. Every few seconds the view blinked and jumped momentarily, like a badly formatted pict-track. She saw the tables and chairs lying where they had been overturned in the stampede, the litter of broken crockery and food bowls. There was the counter, its greasy surface gleaming under the hoodlamps. Behind it, in cover, a short, heavily muscled girl in soft gymnast slippers, gorgeous japanagar silk harem pants and a sleeveless leather waistcoat. She was holding a compact auto tight to her splendid cleavage. Under the fringe of her short bleached hair, her pretty eyes were closed tight.

Never liked the bleached look. Must go back to my natural red.

+Concentrate. That’s not helping+

‘Sorry.’

And there was the ninker. Other side of the counter, edging round towards the far end. The extended magazine projecting down from the pistol grip of his auto was so long, it looked like he was holding a T-square by the top of the rule.

+Apart from anxiety, I can’t assess anything. He’s smoked obscura some time in the last thirty-five minutes. It’s blocking everything.+

‘So he’s not likely to fold if I get a good drop on him?’

+Unlikely, I’d say.+

Kara took a deep, pulse-calming breath, her nose filling with the pungent aromas of spilled food and stewed caffeine. Then she snapped upright, aiming the Tronsvasse compact at the ninker.

Who was no longer there.

‘Where the frig-?’

+He has, I believe, fled. Rabbited, to use your term.+

A sprung service door behind the counter was gently flapping to and fro. Kara ran to it, keeping the auto at full extension in front of her – the trademark ‘ready’ position of armed marshals. Kara Swole had never been in the Departamento Magistratum, but a hardnut chastener, name of Fischig, had taught her the skills some years back.

She eased open the swing door. Beyond it was a gloomy little walkway with a sloped, worn lino floor. Crates of freeze-dried noodle bricks and tubs of mechanically recovered cooking fat were stacked along both walls. A hot, bilious stench drifted up from the kitchens below.

The establishment was called Lepton’s, one of a chain of family-run public dining houses in the Formal D district of Petropolis. Like all the independent bars and eateries, it was in the sinks. Eighty levels of habs and manufactories weighed down upon it and neither the wan sunlight nor the burn-rain ever penetrated this deep. Only the grim, Munitorum-subsidised canteens could afford higher-level positions on or near the surface streetways. All of the public places were open round the clock, and catered for the constant shift-work. People came to eat breakfast at tables beside other workers chowing supper and getting addled on cheap grain liq at the end of a hard shift. Down here it was a dark world of artificial lighting, metal decks, flakboard walls and an indelible layer of grease that coated everything.

Kara ran down into the kitchen. Heedless servitors laboured at bulk skillets or broiling vats, and there was a constant clatter of utensil limbs. The air was thick with steam and food smoke, trapped and stirred by vent extractors that had ceased to function properly generations before. The handful of actual humans working the food line were just emerging up from hiding places behind coolers and workstations. They all jumped back into hiding in terror at the sight of another armed body passing through their infernal realm.

‘Where did he go?’ she demanded of a terrified undercook who was trying to hide himself behind the frying pan he was clutching. He mumbled something unintelligible.

‘Where?’ she snarled again, and put a round through a nearby fryer for emphasis. Scalding fat began to leak and spurt out of the puncture hole.

‘The loading ramp!’ the undercook meeped.

She left the kitchen area and hurried into a broad corridor where the mesh decking was mounted with a trackway for narrow gauge carts. On either side were walk-in larders, bottle stores, hanging pantries and – distressingly – an overflowing employees-only latrine that proved to be the real source of the kitchen’s underlying smell.

The hatch at the end was open. Cool air gusted up at her. She slid flat to the wall for the last few metres.

The loading ramp was a battered metal platform jutting out from the hatch over a dank, rockcrete chamber. Access tunnels, large enough to take carts and freight vehicles, ran off to left and right, lit by pulsing amber lumo-panels. Overhead, dirty air, dripping acid-water and the faintest daylight filtered down through a vent shaft that went right up to the surface levels. Huge, corroded airmills grated around in the shaft.

Kara went to the platform rail and leaned over in time to see her quarry disappearing up the left hand tunnel. She leapt down and ran after him.

By the time they came out into an alleyway, fumed by the yellow light of sodium lamps and crowded with trash-crates, she had closed the distance between them. He looked back, saw her coming, thought about trying to fire in her direction, but ran again.

‘Halt!’ she yelled.

He didn’t.

Kara dropped down on one knee, aimed, and fired the auto from a braced double-handed grip. The single shot punched through the back of his left thigh and he fell sideways, awkwardly. He hit the face of a trash-crate so hard that he dented the scruffy sheet metal.

He was sobbing as she dragged him upright and threw him against the crate again.

‘That was downright rude. I wanted to have a little talk with you,’ she said. ‘Let’s start again.’

He moaned something about his leg.

‘I’ll try not to make that worse. I want to talk to you about Lumble.’

‘I don’t know any Lumble.’

She kicked him in the thigh-muscle above the bullet hole and made him squeal.

‘Yeah, you do. You were happy to talk about Lumble and his business to those pals of yours in the public.’

‘You must have misheard.’

‘I didn’t hear at all, chump. I read your mind. Lumble. He’s the man. You want it, he can get it. Good price too. Grinweed. Yellodes. Baby blues. Looks. He can sort the lot.’

‘I don’t know! I don’t know!’

‘You don’t know what?’

‘I don’t know what you want!’

+Kara.+

‘Not now. Chump, you so know what I want.’

‘I don’t!’

+Kara.+

‘Not now. Listen, you little ninker, I want an intro. I want an intro to Lumble. I want a serious in with the man.’

‘That could be arranged,’ said a voice from behind her.

Kara let the wretch go and he slid down the crate side, weeping. There were six big friggers in the alley behind her, all leather smocks and studded jackets and vat-grown muscle enhancements. The leader had acid-burns across his face, tracing out deliberate designs in scar tissue. Clansters. Moody hammers. Stack muscle.

‘You might have warned me...’

+I tried.+

‘Help you, gentlemen?’ she asked, flashing a grin.

They all smiled back. Their teeth were filthy reefs of steel dental implants and craggy amalgam. Several had lip piercings or secondary teeth woven into their tongue tips.

‘Well, aren’t I just the frigged one here?’ she said. She did a rapid risk-assess. Two had slingblades, two had long-handled industrial mallets and one, the leader, had a chain-fist. It buzzed menacingly as the oiled blade-tracks idled.

She had her auto and her wits. It was even odds in her book.

+It is not even odds, Kara. Do not try it. We will devise another way out of this.+

‘Yeah? Like what?’ she snapped sarcastically.

‘Who you talking to, knuck-bitch?’ the leader asked.

‘The voices in my head,’ she replied, hoping that at least might give them pause. Even in a town as grievously messed-up as Petropolis, folks didn’t like to tangle with the psyk-touched or the demented.

She head-calced that her best starting gambit was to sort the leader with her auto. That would open an account and remove the chain-fist from the equation. From there, it would be a matter of improvisation.

It would have worked too. But as she brought the auto up, the frig-damned ninker on the ground behind her kicked her hard with his good leg and she fumbled forward. One of the work-mallets came down nasty-fast and smashed her gun away into the gutter.

+Kara!+

Somehow she dodged the chain-fist. It scythed a hole through the trash-crate behind her. She jab-punched at the leader’s ribs and felt something give as she dived through, but a slingblade ripped a long cut in the baggy flare of her favourite harem pants. Then a mallet caught her a glancing blow across the left shoulder and she stumbled over onto the gritty rockcrete.

‘Shit! Shit! You gotta ware me! You gotta ware me right now!’

+The distance is too—+

‘Screw the distance! I’m dead meat unless you ware me!’

He obliged. She knew he hated it. She knew she hated it. But there were times when only it would do. The little wraithbone pendant around her neck crackled, and lit up with psyk-light. She convulsed as he took hold and everything that made up Kara Swole – her mind, her personality, her memories, her hopes and desires – folded up and went away into a little dark box made of solid oblivion.

Kara Swole’s body, blank-eyed, leapt up from prone by arching its back. It deflected a mallet-swing with an under-turned hand, and

then side-kicked one of the slingbladers in the chest so hard his sternum snapped like a dry branch.

The sling-blade flew up out of his limp hand, spinning in the air. Kara Swole's left palm lunged out to connect with it – not to catch it but to slap it away, altering its trajectory and greatly increasing its momentum. A clanster dropped his mallet with a thump, and groped up to feel the brand new piercing in his forehead. Then he fell over onto his back.

Straight-legged, bottom out, Kara Swole's body bowed low to avoid a swing from the other mallet, and then it leapt up, spinning horizontally in the air, and delivered a kick with both feet to the face of the mallet wielder.

She landed on her feet, grabbed the other slingblader by the lower jaw, her fingers gripping inside his mouth, and threw him right over onto his back. A back-stamp with her left heel crushed his windpipe. The leader came in, chain-fist shrilling. One of the abandoned mallets was now turning in her hands. She swung it out so the head of it met the punching glove-weapon coming the other way. The mallet-head was completely abraded away in seconds, but it was a duracite tip, and eating it up burned out the drivers of the chain-fist's mechanism. Smoke gusted out of the seized device. Kara Swole's body jammed the splintered end of the mallet-haft into the leader's chest with both hands.

Surrounded by the bodies of the dead and crippled, Kara's own form began to shudder and shake. It dropped down onto its knees, gasping.

Fierce spotlight beams framed it abruptly. Her eyes didn't react to the light.

'Magistratum! Magistratum! Don't make another move or we shoot!'

Pinned in the spotlights, Kara's hands slowly rose in a gesture of surrender.

Armoured and ominous, belligerent figures swept into the light around her, handguns aimed, power-mauls raised.

'On your face! Down! On your face!'

‘I have authority,’ Kara Swole’s voice said, though it wasn’t her own voice at all.

‘You do, huh?’ crackled one of the Magistratum troopers through his visor-mic. ‘What kind of frigging authority explains this?’

Her face, blank-eyed and expressionless, turned up towards him. ‘The authority of the Ordo Xenos, officer. This is an officially sanctioned operation and I am Inquisitor Gideon Ravenor. Please think very carefully about what you do next.’

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