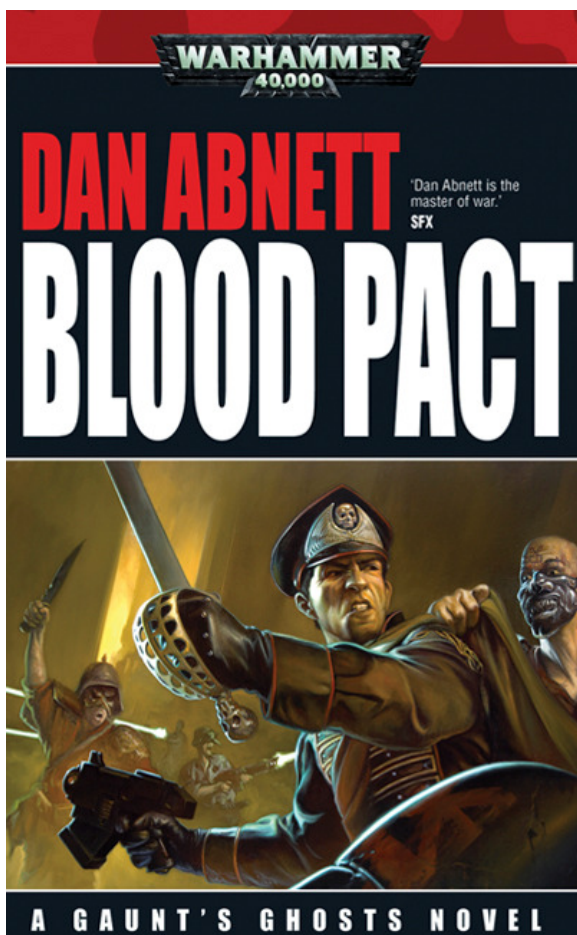




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BLOOD PACT

A Gaunt's Ghosts novel

Edited by Dan Abnett

Pulled back from the front line, the men of the Tanith First await news of their next deployment. But when an enemy prisoner is brought in for interrogation, Gaunt is drawn into a murderous web of intrigue. Who can be trusted, and exactly what does the prisoner know that makes him so valuable? The fate of the Sabbat Worlds Crusade rests upon the answers, and Gaunt must find them out before he is eliminated.

About the author

Dan Abnett is a novelist and award-winning comic book writer. He has written over thirty-five novels, including the acclaimed Gaunt's Ghosts series, the Eisenhorn and Ravenor trilogies and, with Mike Lee, the Darkblade cycle. His novels *Horus Rising* and *Legion* (both for the Black Library) and his Torchwood novel *Border Princes* (for the BBC) were all bestsellers. His novel *Triumff*, for Angry Robot, was published in 2009 and nominated for the British Fantasy Society Award for Best Novel. He lives and works in Maidstone, Kent.



Dan's blog and website can be found at www.danabnett.com. Follow him on Twitter @VincentAbnett

• **GAUNT'S GHOSTS** •

Colonel-Commissar Gaunt and his regiment, the Tanith First-and-Only, struggle for survival on the battlefields of the far future.

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The Lost

(Omnibus containing books 8-11 in the series: **TRAITOR GENERAL, HIS LAST COMMAND, THE ARMOUR OF CONTEMPT and ONLY IN DEATH**)

Book 12 - Blood Pact

• **SABBAT WORLDS** •

Double Eagle

Titanicus

The following is an excerpt from *Blood Pact* by Dan Abnett. Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

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GAUNT ENTERED THE main lobby of Viceroy House. The lights were down, just glow-globes fixed over the reception desks. A man was up a long ladder, changing filaments in one of the massive but unilluminated chandeliers. Three Commissariat cadets were on their hands and knees, scrubbing the marble floor with bristle brushes.

Whhshrrk, whhshrrk, whhshrrk! went the brushes as Gaunt walked past. None of them dared to look up.

Been there, done that, Gaunt thought.

The duty officer at the desk had been alerted to Gaunt's arrival by the outer gate, and was waiting, on his feet.

He saluted. 'Good morning, sir.'

'Good morning.' Gaunt handed him the slip, and the man read it quickly, as if he already knew what it said.

'Thank you, sir. I've called through and announced you. Someone will come for you in a moment, if you'd just wait.'

Gaunt nodded, and stepped away from the desk, removing his gloves and unbuttoning his stormcoat. The duty officer resumed his seat and got back to work. A

minute passed. The brushes continued to go Whhshrrk, whhshrrk, whhshrrk! A courier ran down the hall and out through the main doors. The man fixing the chandelier climbed down off his ladder, folded it up, and carried it away.

Gaunt heard more footsteps, and turned.

It was Viktor Hark.

‘Where did you come from?’ Gaunt asked.

‘I’ve been here all night,’ replied Hark. Gaunt could see how much sleep Hark hadn’t had. Hark was the only man in the regiment whose workload and responsibilities seemed to have increased since they’d moved off the line. War gave men something to do, and when you took that away...

‘It must be bad.’

‘You don’t want to know,’ said Hark. ‘Sometimes I think we’re in charge of a penal unit.’

‘Who is it?’

Hark sighed. ‘It’s a little team this time. A little team of hustlers that includes two captains and a major.’

‘Not Rawne?’

‘I’m afraid so.’

It was Gaunt’s turn to sigh. In the two idle years since Hinzerhaus, Major Rawne seemed to have slowly regressed back to the venomous and untrustworthy malcontent that Gaunt had first encountered in Tanith Magna.

‘And Meryn too, if Rawne’s involved?’

Hark nodded.

‘Who’s the other captain?’

‘You’re not going to believe this,’ Hark replied. ‘Ban Daur.’

‘Well, that’s got to be a mistake. Not Daur. He’d only be involved by accident.’

Hark shrugged.

‘So it’s bad?’

Hark nodded again. ‘It’s a genuine mess, and the charges are going to be severe. I’m not sure how we’re going to pull their arses out of this little conflagration.’

‘So why was I only called in this morning if you’ve been here since last night?’ asked Gaunt.

Hark paused. ‘Well, I was handling it. I was going to go back to Aarlem about an hour ago, but someone told me you had been summoned, so I waited.’

‘You didn’t send for me?’

‘No,’ said Hark.

Gaunt showed him the slip. ‘They sent me this last night.’

Hark looked it over. ‘Damn, Ibram. This isn’t anything to do with Rawne’s latest disgrace. This is something else entirely.’

Somehow, Gaunt already knew that. He’d known it the moment he’d seen Hark coming across the lobby to meet him.

GAUNT SENT HARK back to Aarlem to get some sleep, and waited to be seen. It was another twenty minutes before anyone appeared.

‘Sorry to keep you waiting, Gaunt,’ Commissar Edur offered as he approached. Gaunt shrugged a no-matter, and decided against asking, right away at least, why he was being received by an officer he’d lunched with just the day before.

The truth was, he hadn’t known Usain Edur long, and he didn’t know him well. Hargiter and Zettsman had been regulars at the club for seven or eight months, and Gaunt knew them and the regiments they were attached to. He counted them as decent acquaintances, two of the

semi-regular faces that frequented the Mithredates for lunch or supper. Edur had only been in the city for a week or two. He'd gravitated into their company easily enough; Gaunt had a feeling that Zettsman had introduced him. Edur was affable, a reasonable conversationalist, and expressed an attitude towards duty that Gaunt found appealing, but he had no idea of Edur's background, service or attachment, and as he followed Edur along the hall, he realised that was unusual. That kind of talk always came out. Men talked about their service, and looked for points of shared experience. They noted the places, people and battles they had in common.

Over the two or three times Gaunt had been in Edur's company, Edur had not volunteered anything of the sort, which meant that he was either a remarkably private individual, or he was concealing something.

Gaunt could see that now, too.

Edur led him into a side office. There was a stenographic servitor, and a desk with a chair on either side of it. Edur gestured to one of the chairs.

'Has anybody offered you caffeine?' he asked as he took the other seat.

'No one's even offered me an explanation,' replied Gaunt.

Edur looked up from the closed dossier on the desk in front of him and held Gaunt's gaze. Edur was a few years younger than Gaunt and a few centimetres shorter, and he was good-looking in a clean-cut but bloodless way, like a classical statue. His skin was regally black, and he reminded Gaunt of the Vitrians he'd served alongside. Edur smiled, and the smile was relaxed and genuine.

'Let's just ease our way into this,' he said. 'I've only just been put on this one, so I'm coming up to speed. I

know it's a little awkward that you and I have encountered each other socially in the last week or so, but I think that's why I was put on the matter. I'm known to you, and so this brief can be a little less formal before—'

'Before what?' asked Gaunt.

'We'll get to that,' said Edur.

You're not really known to me at all, Gaunt thought. Where is this going? How much of a chance was it that you suddenly started coming to the club and moving in my circle of comrades? I can almost see through you.

Edur nodded to the servitor, which whirred into life. Delicate cogs chattered the drum of transcript paper around, and the blocks of letter keys lowered into place on their servos.

'Preliminary interview, Ibram Gaunt,' Edur began, and followed that with the date and time. The servitor started to chatter, the little keys tapping the paper, the paper advancing under the platen with a soft ratchet sound. Edur opened the dossier, creased the first page flat with a slide of his hand and read out Gaunt's service summary, which was also duly recorded by the servitor.

'Can you confirm those details?' he asked.

'I confirm them,' Gaunt replied.

Edur nodded. 'You're the CO of the Tanith First?'

'That's correct.'

'A position you've held for twelve years?'

'Correct, aside from a hiatus period about five years ago.'

Edur turned a couple of pages. 'That would have been during the... ah... insert mission to Gereon?'

'Yes.'

'And that mission was?'

'A security mission.'

Edur looked up at Gaunt and smiled as if expecting more.

‘And classified,’ said Gaunt.

Edur pursed his lips and raised his eyebrows. ‘Your command was restored on your return?’

‘It wasn’t quite as clear-cut as that, but yes.’

‘You’re a colonel-commissar?’

‘Yes.’

‘Split rank. That’s unusual.’

‘It is what it is.’

Edur fixed Gaunt with an amused look again. ‘Did you take the Commissariat’s “Advanced Interview Techniques and Methodology” class?’

‘Is that one of your questions?’ asked Gaunt.

Edur shook his head, still amused by something. ‘No, I just thought I’d ask. I’ve seen less deflection in a sword fight.’ He looked back at the dossier, and turned another page.

‘The Tanith First was retired from the front line two years ago?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you transitted here to Balhaut for resupply and retraining?’

‘Yes.’

‘You’ve been here a year?’

‘Yes.’

‘How are you finding it?’

‘Dull,’ said Gaunt.

‘Why?’

‘People keep telling me things I already know.’

Edur laughed. ‘I’m just asking what they’ve told me to ask, Gaunt. It’s a pain in the arse, I know.’

‘Well, let’s get to the part where you tell me why they’ve told you to ask me these questions.’

Edur nodded. 'We will. You've been here a year? Yes, we established that. Anything odd to report in that time?'

Gaunt sat back. 'What sort of odd?'

Edur shrugged. 'Odd approaches? Odd contacts? Anybody shadowing you or hanging around Aarlem?'

Gaunt shook his head.

'Note head-shake,' Edur told the steno. 'Nothing strange at all, then? In the last month especially?'

'No,' said Gaunt. 'One way or another, there's a whole bundle of odd in the Tanith First, but nothing I'm not familiar with.'

Edur pursed his lips again and nodded. 'All right, Gaunt, here's what it is. We've got a prisoner here. A significant capture, very sensitive. There's some talk he should have just been executed, but Section believes there's a potential high value to his intelligence, so they've kept him alive. He's downstairs.'

'What's this got to do with me?'

'We need to get inside his head, and find out what he's got.'

'I understand that,' said Gaunt, 'but again, what's this got to do with me?'

'The prisoner clearly appreciates that the remaining duration of his life, and the comparative quality of that life, will rather depend on how he gives up his secrets. He knows that he will be disposed of the moment we feel he's exhausted his usefulness.'

'So he's not talking?'

'No, he's not,' said Edur.

'Did you bring me down here just so I could suggest you employ methods of persuasion?'

'No,' Edur replied. 'We'd already thought of that, funnily enough. He's quite resistant to pain. Our thinking

was, we'd try a different approach. Offer him something he wants in return for his submission.'

'I see. At the risk of sounding like a vox stuck on auto-send, what's this got to do with me?'

'Everything, Gaunt,' said Edur. 'He wants you.'

BLOOD PACT (SOFTBACK) can be purchased direct from this website and GW mail order, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, and better bookstores.

In the UK: Price £7.99

ISBN: 978-1-84416-822-4

In the US: Price \$8.99 (\$10.99 Canada)

ISBN: 978-1-84416-823-1

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- UK mail order: 0115-91 40 000
- US mail order: 1-800-394-GAME