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# ***ENFORCER***

## ***The Shira Calpurnia Omnibus***

*By Matthew Farrer*

Enforcer Shira Calpurnia maintains a tough line on law and order in the Hydraphur system. Home to Imperial warfleets, this area of space is riven with violence and corruption. Calpurnia's duty is to protect the innocent and punish the guilty - with extreme prejudice. This omnibus collects the novels *Crossfire*, *Legacy* and *Blind* as well as specially written new content from the author.

### **About the Author**

Born in 1970, Matthew Farrer has spent most of the subsequent period in and around Canberra, Australia and is a member of the Canberra Speculative Fiction Guild. He has been writing since his teens, although he didn't break into professional sales until Badlands Skelter's Downhive Monster Show appeared in *Inferno!*. Since then he has published a number of short stories and was shortlisted for an Aurealis Award in 2001.



• **THE INQUISITION** •

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EMPEROR'S MERCY

Henry Zou

The following is an excerpt from *Enforcer* by Matthew Farrer.

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THE FOG WAS thicker now. The still, warm evening air filled with a soup of coloured ornamental smokes and perfumes and some kind of refractor mist that made lights and colours sparkle unnaturally; Calpurnia hastily took her helmet back as Sanja lifted a filter-veil over his face. There was no sign of the girl Calpurnia had struck, and the other revellers were only visible now as a boil of movement through the mist. By the sounds, the party's momentum had not been dented.

‘Any further trouble, Bannon?’

‘None.’ Calpurnia and her deputy had to shout over the noise. Somewhere out beyond the ramp, pyrotechnics were starting to flash through the fog: showers of glowing confetti and miniature starshells flashed and cracked over the heads of the crowd, leaving hazy trails and puffs of hot smoke. Calpurnia fell in with her squad, then turned to salute Sanja in farewell.

The first bullet hit her shoulder at a bad angle, whirred off her carapace and struck a spark off the temple wall, a single tiny chip of black ceramite stinging the chin of the arbitor next to her.

Her reflexes had taken charge before she realised what was happening, sending her darting down the ramp and to one side. The second bullet struck her helmet over the right eye, not penetrating but cracking the armour and staggering her backward in a daze. The third whipped past her ear as her squad pelted down the steps after her, unlimbering shotguns and shields and firing loud bursts over the heads of the crowd.

The movement began like a ripple in grass as a strong wind springs up. The nearest partiers shrieked and ploughed into those further away, until the crowd thickened too much for anyone to force their way through. The mob rebounded off itself, swayed and broke in three directions at once as the Arbites split into two squads and closed around Calpurnia. As she lurched to her feet, groggy and shaking her head, their shields juddered under two more shots and one pitched over backward as a third shattered the cheek-guard of his helmet against his jaw.

Calpurnia tried to will the ringing in her ears away as things seemed to swim around her. It took an age for her to goad her legs into action and another to get into formation behind her guards' shields. They held the foot of the ramp in a textbook Arbites firing line: one row kneeling, shotguns locked through the gunports in their shields to pump out a steady, suppressing fire; the second line standing behind them firing more carefully, aiming shots over their heads. They were aiming high for the moment, trying just to drive the crowd back, but the answering bullets kept coming.

'Bannon! What can you see? Place the shots!' The beat over the vox-horns had fallen silent, and the tumult of the crowd was something the Arbites were more used to shouting over.

'Nothing! We can't spot any shooters, no weapons, no sounds, no flashes!' Bannon's voice had an edge of fear in it. A partygoer, leering with terror, stumbled toward them and two of the squad sent him sprawling with expert shoves of their shields. As that movement parted them for a split-second a third bullet whipped between their shields and scraped Calpurnia's carapace with an impact she felt all down her ribs. She swore and backpedalled. The shots were coming in flat, somewhere at ground level, not a sniper up high. No one she could see had been anywhere near the angle to make that shot. They—

There was a crash from off to her left, a perfume-brazier going over. She glanced at it, registered only a couple of

frightened partiers running away, no guns with them. She hung low and kept moving, sideways across the ramp to the left-hand pillar-plinth. The arbitrators broke their shield-wall into a more fluid line for a mobile firefight, some covering Calpurnia and two on guard over the man who'd fallen. A bullet cracked into the armour on her shoulder and she staggered and cursed; the bastards were all around her. She ran the last couple of paces to the plinth and—

But there was nobody in that direction. This was small-calibre ammo, handgun slugs. And there was no one remotely in handgun range.

The plaza roared with the riot the party had become as they surged back and forth trying to find a safe way away from the shooting. But there was nobody to her left, nobody around where the brazier had been knock—

Bannon leaned out from the plinth for a quick glance beyond it and a bullet smacked into the edge of his shield and ricocheted past Calpurnia's ear so that even through her helmet's padded earpiece she could hear the whine. She grabbed Bannon's shoulder and yanked him back in as a second bullet clipped the rim of his shield.

No. Not possible. Nobody could plan a ricochet shot like that. Could they?

She had to move.

'Go. Fan out towards that overturned brazier. Cover every single side. Assume concealment by the enemy. Now!'

They rounded the plinth and raced forward. The space in front of them was empty, the crowd shoving away to the sides.

'Nothing here!' She was whirling on the spot, trying to—  
Was that movement?

She ducked to one side instead of standing to shoot and it saved her life. The bullet gouged the side of her helmet and knocked it askew – a second earlier and it would have punched through her top lip. She wrenched off the helmet and scampered crabwise away from the others. Whatever it was, a moving target seemed to give it a little trouble.

With no polarising filters over her eyes the refractor-fog set every light to glittering and sparkling. She narrowed her eyes and almost saw—

She sprinted two steps to the side and vaulted an upended table as two more shots skewered the air behind her. A third smacked into the heavy wood and she put three booming stubshots through the space where she thought she might have heard firing. She had been careless about placing her feet and the recoils slammed her through almost a quarter-turn; as she turned it into a backward jog to regain her balance there was a roar as three shotguns opened up to support her.

Nothing. Mist and light, echoes and sobs from partiers sprawled on the ground. Her head was throbbing – one of those head shots had hurt, even through the helmet, and it was catching up with her. She willed herself to stay on her feet.

An eddy in the mists. She put a bullet through it as her squad caught up with her, kept her gun high and moving back and forth in front of her face, wanting a shotgun but painfully aware of the momentary lapse in her guard that a weapon-swap with one of the arbitrators would mean. The giant-bore stub pistol she had been issued with was a commander's weapon, a shock-and-terror weapon, something for a senior arbitor to use for great, ruinous shots at high-profile targets to terrify a crowd of rioters, showing Imperial authority in brutal terms while other arbitrators and sharpshooters did the actual combat shooting. Calpurnia was becoming bitterly aware of its limitations in a straight firefight. She kept moving, dodging, reversing her direction. The lack of a helmet made her almost nauseous with nerves.

A woman lying on her back nearby gasped and twitched, and Calpurnia came within a hairsbreadth of shooting her on reflex. It took her a moment to realise that it had been not panic but physical shock, as though someone had stepped on her. She tucked her body down towards her boots, crouching into a foetal ball and sending two shots over the prone woman, aiming high in a last-moment hope that the rounds would pass over any bystanders beyond and letting the recoil

roll her over and put her back on her feet. Bannon sent a shot-burst through the same space a split-second later and the little dark-haired party-girl seemed to decide her time was up. She shrieked and scrambled to her feet, frightening the people around her into doing the same, and suddenly a score of people were rising up out of the smoke and running for their lives. The mist between them roiled as if...

As if there were another person there, a shape pushing its way through the crowd, displacing air and bodies.

Calpurnia skittered to one side. The ringing in her ears was turning into a yammering that fought against the screams of the crowd. There was a distant crash as one of the parade-floats went over. She hunted for signs, half-saw them. Smoke moving the wrong way here, there a tremor and backflow in the mob as the moving crowd snagged on nothing she could see. It was moving around the edge of the retreating mob, and she could almost feel its gunsights crawling over her.

Her squad was frantic, desperate for a target. There was no time to instruct them – by the time she explained she'd be dead. She'd have to rely on them to follow her fire when she spotted something. It could be moving into position now, or...

She knew what she was looking for now, and had her pistol ready to bear. The stampede in front of her was wavering, the crowd parted and one man stumbled against something unseen. Now. Running on nerves and reflex alone, with barely a conscious moment to aim, Shira Calpurnia put a slug through the clear space and straight through the assassin's heart.



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