



Slaves To Darkness

John French

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After a long and gruelling conflict, the traitors at last close upon Terra. But time is dwindling for an attack. Both Guilliman and the Lion are returning with all haste, and their armies could turn the tide. The hosts of the Warmaster must unite, for only then can they attack the Throneworld itself. While Mortarion is sent on ahead as the fleet's vanguard, it falls to Lorgar and Perturabo to marshal Fulgrim and Angron, both now elevated to daemonhood and perhaps beyond even the will of the Warmaster to command. But Horus lies wounded and as the greatest battle the galaxy has ever known looms, it is up to Maloghurst to hold his fractious Legion together and to wrench Horus himself from the edge of oblivion.

Read It Because

The time is nearly here... but first, the events of Wolfsbane have left Horus in a bad way, and now we get to take a look at the inner workings of the Traitor fleet as it threatens to fall apart.

Slaves To Darkness Details

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From Reader Review Slaves To Darkness for online ebook

F?rat Koçyi?it says

John French has been my favorite Horus Heresy author since his short story "The Crimson Fist" in the anthology "Shadows of Treachery". It must have been hard to write a book fully dedicated to the traitors yet, he has done a superb work to depict the nature of Chaos; once you are in it, there is no way to escape from it. The story of the traitors is much like Requiem for a Dream, a gradual and inevitable fall. I congratulate Mr French and hope he would write a book about Siege of Terra arc.

Kdawg91 says

The latest installment of the Horus Heresy series is a terrific delve into the chaos side of things. It's amazing to me how these god-like primarchs, once they get the power they crave, once they give in to the "dark side" so to speak.....become really really more humanlike.

If you are a Warhammer fan there is a lot of good here. It shows just how far some of the traitor legions have gone and sets up what will definitely be an endgame to beat all endgames.

Terrific read if you are a fan, if not, you'll need to backtrack.

John says

This one takes you to the dark side. The message has gone out for one last muster of the traitor primarchs before the final push, however, Horus is hurt. Wounded from his brother primarch Russ he has fallen silent. Meanwhile the other primarchs are out hunting down their brothers. Perturabo is searching for Angron, Lorgar is searching for Fulgrim. This will be gathering unlike any other since Horus was given the title of Warmaster, in fact it is all happening at that very same place. Ullanor. And never forget, the loyal primarchs are out for blood and hunting. This book just proves to be as incredible as the rest as the overarching story line is drawing to one of the biggest conflicts seen in millennia and one that will affect the Imperium of man like no other.

Bastiaan Vergoossen says

Dear John,

Finished Slaves to darkness this evening. What a wonderful addition to the HH series. Enjoyed it massively. 5 out of 5. Compliments to you for such an entertaining novel at this stage of our journey. Some thoughts. Mild spoilers ahead.

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First of all, the novel was entertaining all the time, all chapters. That's quite a feat for a novel, in my opinion, for most books slow down during the journey, at least now and then. This book didn't, in my opinion. Every time a new chapter started, I was kind of sad that the old one ended, wanting to know how the story of the former chapter would continue. But, when just a few lines or pages into a new chapter, I was again fully immersed into the story.

So, we come to the obvious question: which of the three storylines was the best? Layak, Maloghurst or Argonis. Difficult to say, very difficult. The Layak one was a strong one for sure, but the others were great too.

What were highlights for me in this novel? Well, I loved the Orcus part a lot, the scenes in the webway, the meeting with Fulgrim and all the stuff there. But surely also the scenes at Deluge, the one with Kharn for example, the one with Angron and Perturabo off course too. Loved the scene with Horus in the warp, or dream or whatever or wherever it was, him fighting and fighting, on and on, not wishing to submit. The Ullanor scenes were also very nice, some real emotion there, sometimes gave me the chills. These scenes combined the past (both within the series but also as a reading experience for us readers) with the now and upcoming future (siege of terra and Horus ultimate fate). The conversations between Horus and Mal, about making choices, about lies, about being nobody's slave, good stuff, bringing a bit the old HH feeling with it (Horus rising, the first part of False gods seems like another era almost).

The HH series are at its best (I think) when we come along scenes in which very human things happen to very inhuman / trans - human characters. Love, brotherhood, betrayal, jealousy, honor and so on. Then the HH series are at its height, but also very relatable: although happening in a pure fictional world, they address situations which can happen to you or me in everyday life. Scenes like the Aximand - Torgaddon confrontation in galaxy in flames, or Fulgrim - Ferrus in book V. This book had such of scenes too, so good stuff.

It is also a bit of 'game of thrones in space' (which is a big compliment I think), with so much back stabbing, family issues and so on. Loyalties shift, the unexpected happens, old grudges come to the fore and so on. And even with the ending (the traitors gather), there is still much more going on than just a coming together of traitors.

When considering characters, I think Lorgar and Perturabo stole the show. They were very well handled, in my opinion. Big appearances, as primarchs should be, continuing the developments made by other books and authors and still adding to them. The last scene with Lorgar was too very good, and surprising also. Very curious to see what road he will be on after this book ...

Did I miss something in this book? Well, perhaps I would have liked to see a bit more how GREAT the absence of Horus was felt in the XVI legion. We see bits about it with Aximand and Mal, but this could have had a bit more light in my opinion. To FEEL the absence of Horus even more. And near the end, we see the traitors gather. Well, I would like to see a bit more in detail: more exactly which ships, which companies and commanders and so on. And a bit more on numbers. Here and there we get a bit about numbers, but we still don't know exactly how great the forces of Horus are that are going to attack the sol system. Perturabo knows them, I would like to see a bit more of them too, also to get even more the idea of that MASSIVE scale that the siege of terra shall have. Perhaps with a new series dedicated to the siege, we get more on this. I know some fans want more 'numbers' too

Well, as I said, very good stuff, every chapter and every storyline keeps entertaining, not slowing down for even a bit, not a part where I didn't get through the story in a good way. A very very good addition to the series, making the hype for Titan Death, the Death guard novel and the siege even bigger. Big compliments and keep up this good work ! Cheers !

Northrop Frye says

"Without Horus they were just warlords & killers. Following a dream they did not understand".

"We are going to the cradle of the dragons of war"

A much needed Chaos only Horus Heresy tale.

Unlike 'Ruinstorm' (Horus Heresy #46) where multiple loyalist Primarchs made for a posturing grind, the collection of traitor Primarchs in 'Slaves To Darkness' make for a compelling read.

Michael Dodd says

Book fifty-one in the Horus Heresy series, this is a rare beast – a Heresy novel focusing entirely on unambiguously traitor perspectives. As Horus is brought bleeding from the surface of Beta Garmon to the Vengeful Spirit, Maloghurst issues orders to gather Horus' brothers together. While Lorgar and Perturabo are tasked with finding and controlling their daemonic brothers Fulgrim and Angron, Maloghurst calls on all of his political nous and accumulated power to steer the overall campaign in Horus' absence. With Abaddon away chasing the Wolves, Maloghurst is left clashing with what remains of the Mournival.

It's a story which boils down to one thing – control, whether in terms of the warp, other characters, or ongoing events. There are some intriguing parallels between the traitors as we see them here and the loyalists we've seen elsewhere, but it's clear that there are profound cracks in the traitor alliance as various characters work to turn the situation in their own favour. Maloghurst's attempts to control the Primarchs and his fellow Sons of Horus in Lupercal's name, the choices both Lorgar and Perturabo make in response and the ways in which they interact with their much-changed brothers – it's all fascinating, conflict-ridden stuff, and while Horus himself isn't really centre stage, his presence looms large throughout. By the time the events in this book take place, the traitors will be set for the final approach to Terra; how they get to that point is very interesting indeed.

Read the full review at [https://www.trackofwords.com/2018/06/...](https://www.trackofwords.com/2018/06/)

Robert says

Pros:

- first proper traitor centric without named 'good guys'
- 2/3 not bolter porn
- moves the story along significantly
- some interesting themes and scenes in places
- covers a few different things (variety)
- short for HH/less filler to hit obligatory 4xx pages

Cons:

- 1/3 bolter porn
- poor as standalone, relies very heavily on having read a lot of earlier novels/shorts
- no character development
- plot(s) meh
- reminds reader that in 15 years (in world) 30k has become 40k - legions 95% of way to 40k imagining
- less interesting than uninteresting

Tepintzin says

Let's just subtitle this one "Perturabo fething rules" and be done with it.

Callum Shephard says

For the last three books (ignoring the anthologies, of course) the Heresy has been closing off plot lines. The fate of several legions has been dealt with, a few long-standing questions resolved and side stories closed off. We've had the end of the Imperium Secundus, seen what becomes of the Space Wolves and both the White Scars and Blood Angels are at Terra. So, Slaves to Darkness does the next thing the story needed: Unity. While the subtitle might be "Chaos undivided" a more accurate one would be "Let's get the band back together".

Synopsis

Horus has fallen. At the moment of his legion's triumph in breaking the Imperial blockade to Terra, the wound inflicted by Leman Russ has torn open once more. It is more than merely a mortal blow, and his very spirit has seemingly been splintered by it. As the Sons of Horus fight to disguise this truth from his brothers and hold the battle line together, other primarchs are dispatched to find their wayward brothers. With the Siege of Terra upon them, it is time to gather every remaining astartes within the traitor legions and march on the Emperor's palace.

The Good

Surprisingly, one of the big highlights of the book proves to be Perturabo. John French's depiction of the character has not been a popular one in the past, often reducing the Lord of Iron to a screaming maniac. Along with the Forge World rulebooks, it seems to have approached him with the impression that he's more interested in finding excuses to kill his own troops than effectively leading his forces into battle. This was most obvious when compared with the (if somewhat problematic) more detailed look at the character Angel Exterminatus offered, which gave him some much-needed depth. More than a few people might have expected the return of the hammer-wielding madman, but the Perturabo we get here is far more tempered in his nature.

The Iron Warriors primarch is blunt, expects total obedience and will bump off officers at a rate a Commissar would baulk at, but it's not without reason. The way he's written doesn't make it seem as if he's looking for an excuse to kill everyone around him, or simply has rage as his only emotion. It's far closer in

nature to the original Index Astartes source material than with many past works, and what we have here more than makes up for a few past mistakes.

Equally, Fulgrim has undergone a smooth transition to his daemonic self, shedding the last few humane qualities which clung to the character. He's undeniably Slaaneshi, and the way in which he revels in his excesses is certainly something we have seen before. However, the use of call-backs to his past self and grim reflections of prior books. While this is true of Angron as well, Fulgrim's nature allows him to converse, explore and respond in more ways than simple violence. Combined with the openly flippant and unconcerned nature, it makes him an amusing contrast to the more dedicated primarchs. As a quick example, when he's found in this book and asked to take control of his legion again, he's living it up on a daemon world created by his patron god, and openly tells his brothers to bugger off.

The reason I highlight these two, in particular, is that the book needed a solid basis for the others to work from and build the rest of the narrative around. Without that, the story would have been utterly overburdened in trying to divide its focus between so many different primarchs, their subordinates, and other characters besides. While the likes of Lorgar and Malgohurst also serve as a means to drive the narrative forward - and it's always nice to see the Twisted take a front row seat again - it needed a bolder and more brazenly examine the inherent problem the traitors suffer: Chaos is chaos.

That comment might sound like an obvious one, but all too often Chaos itself is treated as an ordered and regimented thing. It's more a way to show someone go a bit mad, glue some spikes onto their armour and then fly about with all these new daemon powers from one of the four gods. Despite all the various novels which directly contradict this, the general fandom view of this does tend to categorize and label Chaos in this easily defined manner. It's something which is admittedly not helped by the use of daemons emulating their tabletop models, but that's an unfortunately unavoidable issue when it comes to this sort of thing. Chaos, as it's shown in this book, is self-destructive, completely corroding and far from this path to easy power than you might expect. Many points serve as a slap in the face if you're wholly aware of its self-destructive properties, as it finds ways to constantly remind you of just how this effects anything on a large scale.

The traitor legions as they are will not exactly be bringing their A-game to Terra. Many have lost more than they have inherently gained with their alignment to Chaos, as they have suffered a severe breakdown in discipline, supplies and control since the start. While The Path of Heaven had briefly cited this with Horus' conversation to Mortarion, Slaves to Darkness truly shows it. It explores it, it details it, it takes a massive great spotlight and shines it on the legions saying that "This is Chaos", with the larger forces working almost in spite of themselves. Because of their disorganised nature and lack of true investment in the wider war, Horus' strike on Terra has become as much a decapitation effort as a hail mary pass. His legion's way was to claim the heads of the enemy leadership before dividing and destroying the body. Yet, this has turned into an effort to execute the strike while he still has forces who will effectively coordinate such an attack.

What should be praised with French's efforts is that, while this is an exploration of Chaos' weaknesses, it never tries to make the legions themselves truly weak. It avoids the Iron Hands syndrome of taking the message of weakness and emphasising it or exaggerating it until any strength is wiped away. For example, it's made clear that Angron is a loose cannon and a monster who will butcher everything in his path without pause or remorse. Yet, even as it details this, it never downplays the fact he can murder everything in his path, and Khorne's blessing will allow him to solo whole armies at a time. The powers of Chaos can teleport entire legions across light-years of space, bend the fabric of reality and bring a man back from the brink of death. So, while it might show how the empire Horus dreamed of was destined to fail, it never downplays the individual benefits of the Ruinous Powers.

The last point of praise - the last one I can praise without spoiling some of the best bits of the book, such as the saga of a certain Iron Warrior - is its use of scale. We all know that the Siege of Terra is going to be huge. Really, it's the big battle of the setting, with a vast engagement so huge that it is a war unto itself. As such, a few writers might have made the mistake of trying to directly compete with the Siege on that front, but instead, it opts to use scale in a very different manner. By having the viewpoint characters be so diversely scattered throughout the galaxy, by having each repeatedly call-back to past events and story arcs, there's a true sense of immensity to it. It feels as if this is building toward a storm, and serves as a reminder of just how huge all that has come before it truly was.

Even when the book does delve into bolter porn, it's well-timed and extremely well planned. Much of this surrounds the Iron Warriors, but it's used to comment on the state they are in. It draws attention to how the world has changed and ultimately what has become of the well-supplied supplied forces which once made up the legions. This is most evident during the rearguard actions against the Ultramarines and their allied battlegroups, but it even shows up on a very ground level view. Away from the primarchs, the gods and the prophecies, you can see how this has reshaped the soldiers fighting in them even when they are just astartes fighting other astartes bereft of Chaos' direct influence. Plus it even tries to deal with one long-standing issue of casualties, but that does, unfortunately, open up one possible plot hole as it is.

So, with that final note, it's onto the bad parts, as you might imagine.

The Bad

The book doesn't know how to use all of the primarchs. That's all that needs to be said at the start here: It doesn't know how to fully explore and examine each in the right way. This results in several having little more than cameo appearances in the final chapters, mentions or even existing in the background. This could easily be forgiven to a point, but even those which are given the spotlight fail to fully stand out. The reason Perturabo and Fulgrim's roles in the book were so openly praised is that without them this entire novel would have failed. While Lorgar does play an essential role within the story, his presence seems to be there as a mere vehicle. He exists to show off a few interesting scenes while punting the story along to a new location, and his own personal developments only emerge very late into the story. Angron suffers from a very similar issue, in that he exists largely as an obstacle for Perturabo rather than offering more insight into his new daemonic state.

While you might have thought that Horus would be at the forefront of this, even that isn't true. The few moments he gets to highlight his character almost purely emphasise the past and serve either as flashbacks or minor conversations. He's sidelined throughout much of the tale due to the after-effects of his duel in Wolfsbane, and this only hurts the book. Despite the fact his very name is in the series headline, we have seen very little of him overall in this saga. The last time he took any role of true prominence was all the way back in Vengeful Spirit (a deeply flawed book to say the least) and given how his final moment will soon be upon him, he needed more time devoted to his character. By sidelining and limiting his presence here, it didn't hurt the book but it seems like a move which will hurt the series.

What was definitely a much more negative move on the part of John French was how important the Sons of Horus truly are within the story. Compare the opening trilogy with this book and you'll note a number of major differences, the least of all is how it fails to give Aximand and Abaddon anything of relevance to do. While the Mourning is supposed to be a reflection of Horus himself, and a vital part of the legion, it's all but forgotten here. Remember how Aximand was traumatised by his need to kill his brothers? Forgotten and discarded. Remember how Abaddon effectively ceases to exist for whole eras of the series? That comes back in full force here. Multiple C-list characters take their place, and this only further undermines the legion as a

whole as it robs them of an opportunity to explore their identity.

Now, as great as the initial trilogy was there's no denying that the Luna Wolves lacked something in comparison to the other legions. They were not nearly so solidly defined in terms of internal culture, style and visual characteristics. That was because this was Horus' story at the time, and that of Loken. Yet as time moved on, more and more novels began to better utilise the internal cultures of their legions, from the Thousand Sons to the World Eaters. Slaves to Darkness could have corrected this - it certainly had space, but it, unfortunately, failed to use it effectively. Instead, it uses the time to try and flesh out characters who will never be seen again beyond this book, or restore a status quo in time for the Siege itself. This is to say nothing of a major twist involving Maloghurst which was likely intended to be tragic and impactful, but it comes across as infuriating due to its timing and delivery.

The final issue is perhaps the greatest problem which has plagued the Horus Heresy series since the day Fulgrim was published. While some books veered away from this and some actively tried to correct it, time and time again the stories of characters would push too far forward. The state of the galaxy, the state of the legions, the situation with the primarchs themselves, everything doesn't seem like it's from M31 anymore. It's all too close to M41, and in the space of fifteen years the galaxy has more or less reached the state it's supposed to reach in ten thousand. While the Horus Heresy is definitely an integral part of the setting - arguably the most important chapter of its history - it should have been the start of the decay which set into the Imperium. Instead, it's already reached a point where we're now supposed to believe it will remain at, without any change, for the next ten millennia.

The Verdict

At the end of the day, Slaves to Darkness is still a John French book. It benefits from his descriptions, still and punchy if poetic descriptions, but it stumbles at a few too many points to truly stand out. As result, it's a serviceable tale with some decent moments and interesting concepts, but that's it. Those fully invested in the series will want to get this one due to how it sets up the final arc of this long-running story, and for its more engaging chapters. At the same time though, you will need to stomach as many disappointing moments as great ones to get through this novel.
