



The Many Deaths of the Black Company

Glen Cook

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In *Water Sleeps*, the surviving members of the Company regroup in Taglios, determined to free their fellow warriors held in stasis beneath the glittering plain. Journeying there under terrible conditions, they arrive just in time for a magical conflagration in which the bones of the world will be revealed, the history of the Company unveiled, and new worlds gained and lost... all at a terrible price.

And in *Soldiers Live*, no Black Company member has died in battle for four years. Croaker figures it can't last. Then a report arrives of an old enemy newly active again. It attacks them at a shadowgate — setting off a chain of events that will bring the Company to the edge of apocalypse and, as usual, several steps beyond.

The Many Deaths of the Black Company Details

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Author : Glen Cook

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From Reader Review The Many Deaths of the Black Company for online ebook

Angela says

23 November 2015: \$5.99 on Kindle

Rick Staten says

A satisfying completion to the black company series though it leaves me asking what next for lady, croaker, and their daughter. It opened up whole new possibilities through croakers new role, ladies new powers and glimpses into other worlds and histories. Dont get me wrong though, it does end the story line nicely wrapping up the main antagonist/antagonists.

Markus says

This is my review for not just this omnibus edition consisting of the last two books, but for the entire series.

In the beginning, there was the Black Company. In the end, the Black Company remains, relentless and unyielding, refusing to surrender to the jaws of death.

If you're actually intending to read all of this, then I would urge you to pour a cup of coffee or tea and make yourself comfortable. This will be the longest review I've written, complete with tons of quotes to make it even longer. Still not dissuaded? Well then, in my very last review of the *Chronicles of the Black Company*, let me indulge in my passion for storytelling and begin by telling you a little story...

In those days the Company was in service to the Syndic of Beryl...

- The Black Company

Once upon a time in the city of Beryl in the north, the tale of the last of the Free Companies of Khatovar began. To me it feels like an eternity has passed since those days. Since the days when Croaker was the Company physician, Lady was the dark sorceress with supreme power over the world's greatest empire, and fabled Khatovar was just a distant dream.

Like an avalanche of memories, the tale grew in the telling. The Black Company was recruited by the villainous Soulcatcher. It fought alongside the Ten Who Were Taken, the most powerful wizards of their time. It stood against the Dominator, the darkest shadow ever to fall upon the world. It became an instrument for the fulfilment of the prophecy of the White Rose. And it journeyed south to find its roots in the lost city of Khatovar. All the while people lived and died, new members joined and rose in the ranks, and the Company went ever onward.

The books must be written. The truth must be recorded even if fate decrees that no man ever reads a word I

write. The Annals are the soul of the Black Company. They recall that this is who we are. That this is who we were. That we persevere. And that treachery, as it ever has, failed to suck the last drop of our blood.

- Water Sleeps

Even though the Black Company is led by a Captain, at its heart there is always an Annalist. Some of them get appointed to the job while others take it upon themselves in times of crisis. The style of the series changes for each one. There are those who value writing long sentences and beautiful words, and there are those who insist on merely recounting facts in a direct manner. All are different, and all provide a different touch to the Annals they leave behind.

The one thing that all the books have in common, is that they are written from the viewpoint of a soldier, a member of a mercenary company in the service of whoever pays the most. And that is the greatest achievement of Glen Cook in writing this series; the fact that you get a fantasy series written not about larger-than life heroes and the classical clichéd archetypes of the genre, but about ordinary people struggling to get by in a world of darkness and despair. Steven Erikson, author of the *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, once stated that Glen Cook was the first fantasy author to bring the story down to a truly human level.

When it comes to the actual writing, these books are written exactly the way you would expect from the Annals of a mercenary company. There is little of the eloquence and grandeur found in the books of authors like J. R. R. Tolkien and Guy Gavriel Kay. There is mostly directness and simplicity, but there is also a lot of beauty to be found in that simplicity if you know where to look. And like this review is an example of, there are dozens of great quotes to be found while turning the pages.

An old, tired man. That is what I am. What became of the old fire, drive, ambition? There were dreams once upon a time, dreams now all but forgotten. On sad days I dust them off and fondle them nostalgically, with a patronizing wonder at the naivete of the youth who dreamed them.

- The White Rose

The Chronicles of the Black Company was always Croaker's tale. Other members of the Company have taken up the annalist's pen from time to time, and one might argue that the protagonist of the series is the Black Company itself, but the most important character was always Croaker. He began in the first volume as the young and rash Company physician and annalist whose love for a wicked sorceress came to fruition. He later turned into a brilliant strategist and a military dictator, and in the end he goes back to his former role, and scribbles down the final volume of this wondrous story. The nostalgia is almost overwhelming.

Croaker, however, is not the character that truly made me love this series. That award goes to Lady. The Lady of the Tower. Her journey is even more astonishing than that of Croaker. Hundreds of years ago, long before the Black Company was even formed, Lady was the wife of the Dominator, the tyrannic ruler of the North and the original master of the Ten Who Were Taken. She was defeated and buried alive along with her husband long ago, but when a band of cultists tried to revive them both she betrayed him, left him in his dark tomb, and seized all power for herself. The most powerful sorceress ever to walk upon the earth, she rules her empire with an iron fist and sees everything with the Eye of Truth. Until the Black Company arrives, and her life is changed forever.

Death and despair are what we endure all our lives. This world is all one of pain and loss illuminated only briefly by moments of happiness and wonder. We must live for those times, not bemoan their passing.

- She Is the Darkness

The relationship between Croaker and Lady was probably one of my favourite aspects of this series (I'm probably a secret romantic somewhere deep inside). It starts out with a young physician creating sexual fantasies in his mind about the Company's enigmatic mistress, but after decades of war and a common history, it grows into so much more. Direct and sometimes brutal, it fits the tone of the series particularly

well, and in the end it is definitely among the most fascinating and rewarding love stories in the fantasy genre. So to those looking for romance, this series has that as well!

It would take lots of time to write about all the great characters this series has to offer, but with so many wonderful men and women, I would love for you all to get to know them at some point. Soulcatcher, the most powerful of the Ten Who Were Taken. Raven, the mysterious northern nobleman who murdered his own wife to join the Company. One-Eye and Goblin, the wizard friends who are constantly jabbing at each other. Mogaba, a high-ranking member of the warrior class of Gea-Xle. Darling, a mute farm girl with a great destiny. Narayan Singh, the living Saint of the Deceiver cult. There are heroes and villains and everything in between, and they all deserve your time.

Those who form it come and go but the Company is forever. Every brother, great or small, is a snack just not yet snapped up by the devouring maw of time.

- Bleak Seasons

The time of the old members of the Black Company is soon to come to an end. A new generation is being readied to take up the mantle and the banner of the skull. Those who made up the Black Company of old are either gone or old enough to retire from soldiery forever. But in the Annals of the the Black Company, where their deeds have been written down by masters of the craft, they will never be forgotten.

In the night, when the wind dies and silence rules the place of glittering stone, I remember. And they all live again.

- Soldiers Live

Well then, a question arises. After all the three and four-star ratings for the separate books (there was even a two-star rating), how can I possibly justify giving five solid stars to the series as a whole? Have I just had a fit of irrational generosity? No, the thing is that I've decided to present the series with the only rating it deserves, instead of the rating I would have to give it if I were to pick the average of my book ratings. Each of the books can be considered a relatively small piece in a much greater puzzle, and in the end all the pieces come together, leaving a result that is surprisingly close to perfection despite the flaws of each individual piece.

The Chronicles of the Black Company is, in the end, one of my all-time favourite fantasy series. To be able to come along on the grand journeys of this ragged band of mercenaries has been a wonderful literary experience. These are not the most skillfully written books ever published. They do not have the most enchanting story either. There is just something about them. Something that makes me want more. Something that makes me want to read them again from the beginning as soon as possible. And that mysterious something is why I would not hesitate to call this series a true masterpiece, and an astounding achievement by a man who changed the fantasy genre forever.

That is all I have to say about this wonderful series. All that remains is to finish this review by giving you one final quote written by the great Croaker...

There were dreams. I remembered everyone who had gone before me. I remembered the places and times. Cold places, hot places, weird places, always stressful times, swollen with unhappiness, pain and fear. Some died. Some did not. It makes no sense when you try to figure it out. Soldiers live. And wonder why.

- Soldiers Live

This is one of two reviews I have done for this series. The introductory one can be found [here](#).

Derek says

I really enjoyed the two books contained in this omnibus. Glen Cook does a great job of sweeping you into his world and involving you with this characters. There are two more books scheduled to be released in the future, but with no update on when/if these will ever be released you could consider *Soldiers Live* the finale of the Black Company series, and what a finale it was.

I found myself sad and heartbroken at times as Croaker outlives a lot of his friends and allies in the Black Company but still found that I did not want to put it down (a sign of a great book).

This series is a great read for anyone who loves epic Fantasy.

Adrienne says

I liked this omnibus about as much as I expected but much less than I'd hoped. Better than the third, not as good as the second, nowhere near the first. Ah, well.

The first book, *Water Sleeps*, is narrated by Sleepy, who's taken over as interim Annalist in the last fifteen (!!) years since the end of *She Is the Darkness*. Meh. I found myself wondering why it took her so long to enact all her plans. Strangely, I didn't mind her as a narrator, but that might have been because she was the only remaining obstacle between me and the last book. The book narrated by Croaker.

However, *Soldiers Live* didn't really stand up to my expectations. I guess I'd built them up too much from the first omnibus. Yes, my favorite narrator of the series is back - but he's changed. I expected that, having gone so long without his words, but I wanted to see more of that change. And really - honey? sweetheart? I couldn't really see those words coming out of his mouth, but I imagine that's because we've missed so much of his story. And it's a story I wanted, darn it! While there were a few gems in there that recalled the old days (just as Croaker himself did), it wasn't enough. I guess the thing I originally liked about the Black Company (other than the mercenary aspect, double roles, and awkward romance) was the Old Crew and how well they knew each other. That presence was missing as many of them died off in the intervening books and were subsequently replaced with new characters from the South. But I never felt that same camaraderie, even after two whole books.

One of my biggest gripes with the later books of this series is the prevalence of plot devices! Mainly, *letting your enemies live for no good reason at all!* In case they're useful? Seriously? After everything that they've done! I don't think so. After all, this is the Black Company we're talking about. They just don't do that.

The omnibus did pick up in the last 50 of so pages (out of what, 780?) once we met up with, er, Booboo. That brought all Croaker's emotion right back into the story for me. While I rolled my eyes for most of that plot line (which started off as quite a cliché *and* cliffhanger), it managed to recall some of the longing from *The Books of the South*. But those 50 pages weren't enough - and I'm still not sure how I feel about the end, but I think I liked it. Those last 50 pages bumped this up a star for me.

All in all, I am not unhappy that I read the whole series and am actually a bit sad now that it's over, but after *Shadow Games*, none of the stories could really compare.

And now, in the words of our favorite Annalist, I am putting the pen down.

Timothy says

As an avid fan of the Black Company, I would dearly love more books following their exploits and continent-spanning adventures and infamy, but if none ever surface, *The Many Deaths...* represents, whether intentionally or otherwise, a perfect place to end the series. A superb and thoroughly satisfying end to the best Fantasy series I've ever read. Conclusion and resolution both, with space sufficient to explore and extrapolate further (as I believe is Glen Cook's intention).

Commensurate with the rest of the series, *The Many Deaths of the Black Company* is stuffed with brilliant characterisation; the key personalities figuring large even as you note the small nuances to their respective personalities that makes them so familiar, believable, and endearing. Thoughtful plotting and pacing sustains the book well, to the extent I had a couple of nights where I read for far longer than intended, such was the need to keep pace and follow the developments occurring. Those familiar with the tense and engrossing action sequences of the series will find plenty to enjoy here, of particular enjoyment the grand finale, so to speak, towards the end of the book.

I have no complaints, no constructive criticisms, nothing at all I can find detrimental in any capacity in these books. So masterfully composed and constructed, with grizzled, curmudgeonly, and nefarious characters, most of whom are downright scoundrels, paradoxically enough, they're also the most charming and endearing characters I've ever encountered. The depth and complexity in the relationships Cook has constructed is the strongest asset of the entire series; yes there's a fantastic story of warfare and empires and dark prophecies, but it is these young (and old) Company lifers that carry us along with them through the vicissitudes of a mercenary's life.

You're never quite satisfied or convinced that they're either wholly and solely the bad or good guys - their morality isn't quite fixed, sure enough, in concrete terms, but certain principles or omissions thereof remain firm and help give a greater sense of consistency and grounding realism to their actions, decisions, and delineated perspectives. These colourings help inform the profound relationship dynamics explored throughout the series; as Croaker notes very early on in his *Annals*, for many the Company is their only family, dysfunctional and more than occasionally terminal as it may be.

Such as it is, I am indebted to Glen Cook for the epic adventure he has written here, for the sinuous machinations and unfathomable destinies played out, for the burdens of suffering and destruction wrought by and inflicted upon the Black Company's luckless bastards, and for the exemplary rendering and depth of the most human of qualities, time and again, amongst a motley group of characters - murders, thieves and miscreants all, who I have had such tremendous fun with. I cannot wait until I read it again.

Wm says

Wow, this did not go in the direction I thought it would, but that's not a bad thing in this case. It wraps up the series in a way that is satisfying without being too overt and in a way that has hints of realism and the randomness that we've come to expect. It is less about awesome heroes and more about the ability to adapt to changing conditions and alliances and technologies and knowledge and, above all, the indomitable soul of the Black Company. That is, that no matter who dies, who defects, who loses heart, Soldiers live.

Jennifer says

Holy hell. I'm finally finished. I can't explain the lack of active interest I had in this one. I feel like I SHOULD have liked it more than I did. And I do actually like the fact that this omnibus comes back around to focus on Croaker's viewpoint. I like the storyline. I like the characters. But for some reason I couldn't summon up any enthusiasm for getting this book read. There was no point in time while reading it, that I felt I just HAD to read one more chapter before putting it down. I even went a couple of days without reading anything at all. I almost feel bad, because I'm left feeling like it deserves a higher rating, but I just wasn't really into it.

Travis Orders says

Unlike many people, I cannot rate the individual books, I can only rate the series as a whole. I read them all in omnibus form, one following the other, and enjoyed pretty much every page of them. I have read a good deal of reviews, where the later books are panned, but I thoroughly enjoyed the gritty writing style throughout. The characters DO "write" in a somewhat similar tone, but I don't find that to be a detractor. They do serve together, and are bound to share attributes. I was impressed with how Cook managed to marry high & low fantasy... Almost as impressed with it, as the eloquence of some of his prose.

Because I cannot do individual reviews, I am reposting this on the review for the other books. I know it is not a lot to go on, as far as reviews go... But wanted to focus on what I felt were really strong points of all of his books... I also found the end of the series to be quite sublime.

Alissa says

"That is us. The Black Company. Wicked deeds done dirt cheap. But by damn! You had better pony up when payment is due. Otherwise, if we must, we will come back from the grave itself to make sure our accounts are properly balanced."

Joshua Simon says

These two books (Water Sleeps and Soldiers Live) may be my favorite in the series. Saying that about the last two books (at least for now) in a series says a lot about Glen Cook as a writer.

Yes, there are "many deaths" as the title says but each one feels fitting considering what's been established before. Some endings are happy, most are not which shouldn't surprise the reader given Cook's world thus far. The conclusion is satisfying to me in that there is closure regarding most of the storylines. However, a few doors are left open for future books.

This was the first series I ever reread and I enjoyed it even more the second time around. No one builds characters or tells a story like Glen Cook does.

Spencer says

As far as I can tell, this is the last of the Chronicles of the Black Company. I felt this resumed the quality of the other books in the series, after a mild dip found in the Glittering Stone Vol. 1.

The end of a series is always tricky, and going in I had pretty low expectations. Given the nature of the Chronicles, and how characters come and go throughout, I wasn't sure how Cook would wrap it up while remaining true to the series. While there were parts of this that I wasn't very happy with, I feel like he did a pretty good job, and the ending exceeded my expectations in that regard.

The way I read it, the series spanned about 10 original books, grouped into 4 collections. With any body of work that size, you'll have some ups and downs, and this was no exception, but in general I thought it was a good read. It remained sufficiently different from other fantasy series to keep me interested, and this book was a decent end to it.

Milda Page Runner says

Water Sleeps 4* review

Soldiers Live 5* review

Jimmy says

This final Omnibus for the chronicles of the infamous Black Company brings the whole story to a powerful close. I was very satisfied with the ending. Croaker is still a complete badass well into his 50's. If you've gotten to the point where you'd read this book, you've obviously been through 8 books before it. Enjoy!

James Tallett says

And it's over. Like many series, this one went down hill a little as it dragged onwards. The characters in the later stories (especially the books of the south onwards) just aren't as compelling or interesting as the Books of the North.

Also, especially in Soldiers Live, there seemed to be some completely unnecessary and gratuitous deaths, including characters who had no right being killed by what killed them. Also, many of the characters dropped out of the story with no explanation as to what happened. They just happened to wind up dead completely off screen.

Unfortunately, rather than ending the series on a high note, it clearly ended on a low.
