



Praetorian of Dorn

John French

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As the first assault on the Solar System begins, the strength of the Imperial Fists and the seemingly impregnable fastness they have built is tested at last...

Recalled from the Great Crusade after Ullanor, Rogal Dorn and the VIIth Legion were appointed as the Emperor's praetorians – but only after the Warmaster's treachery was revealed did the full extent of that sacred duty become apparent. Now, the Solar System comes under attack for the first time since the war began, and many of the seemingly impregnable defences wrought by the Imperial Fists prove inadequate. With all eyes fixed firmly upon this new threat beyond the gates of Terra, who in turn will protect Dorn from the enemy within?

At last, Rogal Dorn and the VII Legion take centre stage in a Horus Heresy novel! And it's a doozy, as the assault on the Solar System begins. Or does it?

Praetorian of Dorn Details

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Author : John French

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From Reader Review Praetorian of Dorn for online ebook

Abhinav says

You can read the full review over at my blog:

<https://shadowhawksshade.wordpress.co...>

Of all the Legions we've seen so far in the series, it is perhaps the Imperial Fists of whom we have seen very little of in comparison. The World Eaters and the Iron Warriors might make a claim as well, but they have at least been at the forefront of the Heresy all the way while the Imperial Fists have been relegated to the defense of Terra and seemingly have done little of note, being a static legion in effect. Which kind of rankles since the VII Legion is as interesting as any of the others and Dorn's role as the Praetorian of Terra is a vital one in the Heresy.

John French's Praetorian of Dorn was all set to change the shortcomings of the series with regards to the VII Legion. Pitting Dorn and his sons against the vile machinations of Alpharius and his nefarious sons, Praetorian of Dorn turned out to be a rather mixed novel that spent far too much time on the XX Legion rather than the VII, and thus failed to really elucidate a strong sense of Legion personality for the Imperial Fists while the Alpha Legion only got better and better. With some big revelations and a fantastic climax, it wasn't a bad novel however, but it did leave me very dissatisfied in the final reckoning.

As with many other Alpha Legion-oriented stories we've seen in the past, Praetorian of Dorn is one massive counter-espionage and sabotage mission story. Charged by none other than Horus Lupercal, Alpharius sends out his legionaries to carry out one of the most challenging and audacious tasks yet in the great war that has ended the dreams of the Great Crusade and the glorious reunification of Mankind. Both warriors of the Alpha Legion and their many mortal agents across the length and breadth of the Sol System work at destabilizing the defenses of Terra even as Rogal Dorn dispatches his own Imperial Fists to thwart these infiltrators and traitors.

If there is any "main" protagonist of the novel, it can be said to be Master Archamus, Dorn's equerry and the leader of his personal bodyguard, the Huscarls. The reason I say that he's the protagonist is because he's the most significant Imperial Fists character in the novel other than the cameos by Rogal Dorn, and because we get some interesting flashbacks back to the early days of the Imperial Fists when Dorn was found and the first generation of new warriors created with his gene-seed. And Archamus was among those first twenty warriors raised up into the legion by Dorn himself, although by the start of the novel he is the last surviving member, the "Last of the First". It's an interesting hook for the character certainly and I quite enjoyed all his scenes. There are some good depths to his character and John does his best to explore those.

Humberto (Letras de Medianoche) says

Omg!!! spoiler alert!!!

this is a game changing part of the "Horus heresy" story.

DarkChaplain says

Review also published here

Praetorian of Dorn is in many ways a great - and much needed - entry to the Horus Heresy series. In some ways, however, it left me wanting. I didn't quite know how to feel about the overall book when I finished it. I loved many parts, while others left me surprisingly cold or even disappointed.

My main complaint will boil down to what the novel set out to be, and how it approached that. This is the *first* actual Imperial Fists installment. Yes, they have been featured here and there (Dorn as early as *Horus Rising*, or the extremely cool novella *The Crimson Fist* from *Shadows of Treachery*, also by John French), but never actually had a novel to name their own. This was down to their position within the Heresy War itself: Rather than being out fighting and denying the traitors at every turn, Dorn and co were stuck at Terra, turning the Palace into a fortress.

So this should, by all rights, have been *the* Imperial Fists book, until the Siege of Terra begins. Surprisingly, it was not that. Its scope was very limited, and the constant threads woven by the Alpha Legion and their operatives just took much-needed pagetime away from the Fists in favor of constructing a complex network of feints and subterfuge.

We are treated to some very, *very* gratifying scenes featuring Rogal Dorn and the book's protagonist Archamus, master of his Primarch's Huscarl retinue, and for all intents, Archamus personifies most of the best traits of the Imperial Fists. He is a shining example of his Legion, so insights we gain through his role in the book reflect well on his Legion - but he is just *one* Space Marine. Even adding sergeant Kestros to the range of protagonists, as Archamus recruits him for his mission, we don't get to see much of the wider Legion, or even their labours on Holy Terra itself.

Whereas many other Legion-focused books in the series, especially when it came to first full-length outings, (re)defined their Legions' roles within the Great Crusade and Heresy and added a distinct character to them, I felt that *Praetorian* kinda failed at doing the same. I read a well-made argument that the perceived "vanilla"-ness of the Fists here is down to the Legion identifying themselves not by their Primarch's origin world, but by their duty within the Crusade and Heresy, which I can get behind, but even then the detail is scarce and the sample mass is too tiny to really judge that one way or another.

Looking at the Dramatis Personae list at the start of the book again after having finished it, not even half the listed Fists characters were really relevant to the story being told. I thought we'd get a good look at the overall Sol system's defences and the various Lord Castellans under Dorn, but while they are listed and certainly named throughout, their appearances, if they even entered the stage personally, were brief and as a result frustrating to me.

I enjoyed Archamus, and the interlude chapters focused on his rise throughout the Legion. Seeing his recruitment, his reaction to meeting Rogal of the house of Dorn for the first time, his defiant nature during implantation and first training, it all added up to create a good picture of Archamus. It gives a solid feel of his role, and his importance to Dorn himself. John wanted to make this novel about Archamus, and he succeeded in that to a praiseworthy degree. I liked the character, his baggage, his stoicism, and his fears. Even his relationship with Demetrius Katafalque, who we've seen before, made me smile. There wasn't much overlap between their paths here, but what there was of it was well handled and gave me an impression of shared history and loyalty.

Kestros, I'm afraid, didn't shine nearly as well next to Archamus. He came across as blunt, which admittedly was part of why he was recruited, but it made me less interested in him. Especially in his arguments with Andromeda of the Selenar cult I was swayed more towards the female's position than Kestros's. She contributed a lot to the plot and Archamus's deliberations, and is responsible for some chuckles here and

there. From how she was being set up, I wouldn't be surprised to find her as one of the founding members of Malcador's Inquisition, and would love to see more of her. Kestros meanwhile played third fiddle in the trio, and came across as relatively forgettable.

I was surprised to see how quickly the plot moved away from a direct threat to Terra and the Imperial Palace, just to move towards Pluto, too. It seemed odd to me just how quickly the Alpha Legion pulled their presence off Terra, when they had the knife at the Imperium's throat already - to the point of issuing a direct challenge to Rogal Dorn, within the Palace's inner sanctum.

I know, I know, the Alpha Legion is all sneaky and confusing, lies within lies within schemes and betrayals, but *still*. They were in, then were out, and while there are plot reasons that would indicate why that is, it still felt odd.

However, as negative as this review may sound so far - I really enjoyed *Praetorian of Dorn*. It had a lot of twists and turns that should be the hallmark of AL warfare by now, but also had some neat flashbacks to pre-Heresy events focusing around Archamus. Rogal Dorn comes across as the idealist he was supposed to be, and John did a marvelous job depicting his uncompromising nature, especially in the final chapters. Dorn shone in every scene he was in, which made me wish he was in *more* parts of the book and didn't leave the stage in favor of Archamus trying to unravel the Alpha Legion plot at his request. I understand that French probably didn't want to expose us too much to the Primarch himself, and I can generally agree with that, but I'd also say that those sections were the best parts of the whole novel.

The author's passion for the Alpha Legion, dating back years even as far as his Black Library contributions are concerned, is clear as day. The Legion's schemes were constructed in an exciting manner, with many elements working together so perfectly that, while it requires a certain dispensation of disbelief, it had me at the edge of my seat. The first few chapters start off extremely chaotic, almost disjointed, but soon intertwine and drip-feed the reader answers, steadily building up to twist after twist until the big reveals start dropping. I'd go as far as to say that John's rendition of the Alpha Legion was brilliant. From the range of operatives, the small cogs assembling into a gigantic machine of treachery, to the eventual strike for the throat, I was happy with what he did, even if some fans are dismayed by the big climax at the end.

But that sheer brilliance when it comes to the Hydra is the big reason why I was disappointed by the Imperial Fists. I cannot say for certain, but it felt to me like more pages were dedicated to Alpharius and co than to the Fists, and the collective actions of the sons of Dorn paled in comparison to what the Alpha Legion accomplished here. "Alpharius" took the spotlight, and Dorn struggled to keep up.

Likewise, I would have liked to see more of Malcador and his agents, and the complete absence of the Adeptus Custodes felt jarring. On top of that, with the book ending parallel to where Chris Wraight's *The Path of Heaven* left off, and the novel being set firmly after *Vengeful Spirit*, the Space Wolves should still have been around Sol - yet no mention or appearance ever dropped in the book.

Yet still, the author pulled some pretty incredible void battles out of his hat, and fleshed out the Sol system in a variety of ways. Details from the ForgeWorld books were worked in, and some of his 40k Alpha Legion characters feature here - one being in an odd spot by the end that definitely needs following up on. The book gave a good view of where the system stands, and the degree of readiness, weariness and sense of duty everybody involved in the fortification of Terra seems to feel.

I just wish there had been more of those things and some of the Alpha Legion involvement had been shorter, or less spread out. Every chapter jumps from place to place, often between the AL's many operatives, whereas I might have preferred a stronger focus on the Fists. I noticed that I enjoyed the book's first half considerably more than the second, despite, or maybe because of, the operative subplots. Once the threads converged and Dorn and co sprung into more decisive action, the plot was firmly rolling and couldn't really slow down to flesh out the Imperial Fists' Legion character much, whereas the Alpha Legion's

characterizations shined *because* of said action. It is another instance where the Fists' static, robust nature works against them, I believe.

The more I think about the book, the more little points I spot that bug me. Overall the novel is very strong and full of good stuff, but these smaller misgivings add up for me. I wish I had enjoyed this more than I did. Heck, the night of release I could barely sleep because of how excited I was for it. I ended up listening to *The Lightning Tower* again, which features Dorn and Archamus and was one of John French's primary inspirations for this book. I've listened to it so often over the years, I can speak along chunks of dialogue without much trouble.

And where he tackled Dorn's idealistic nature, Archamus's defiance, or the Legion's history, French absolutely succeeded. I loved that. I loved seeing Dorn tell Alpharius off, pre-Isstvan. I loved seeing Dorn take charge and calm the rising panic of the Palace's defenders. I loved seeing him in action and explaining his father's vision to a young recruit.

If only the Alpha Legion hadn't been so dominantly represented and made up so much of the book's action that there was no choice but to react left for the Imperial Fists, I would have easily given this one a top spot in the series to date. It is still a really powerful book as far as the Horus Heresy is concerned. It is worth reading, and I recommend it. It just isn't what I expected it to be, and didn't cover all the bases of what the series needed this book to be for the Praetorian of Terra and his collective sons, even though it struck gold with Dorn's own Praetorian.

Dylan Murphy says

To steal a quote from easily one of my favourite people of all time:

“Paranoia rules this novel, soaked into every page. The revelations of just how far the Alpha Legion extend their reach is masterfully handled; all the way from early symbolism up to its nail-biting end.”

-Marc Collins

Praetorian of Dorn is John French's first numbered novel in the Horus Heresy series, and by the gods, it really goes a long way into showing that he is more than able to keep up with the Black Library's top authors and probably show them a thing or two. I feel like John French has really pushed the envelope on quality at BL and improved their standard, and I really cannot wait to see what he does next.

The story itself weaves in and out of bloody war and vicious intrigue, and is perhaps the new “best” that we have seen the Alpha Legion. Since the events of ‘Legion’ by Dan Abnett took place before Horus' betrayal, we get to see some of the seed planted by the Alpha Legion during the Great Crusade really flower. From literal sleeper cells and sabotaging agents, to absolutely blood thirsty ambushes and traps, we get to really see the terrifying glory of the Alpha Legion.

On the flip side, I felt that the Imperial Fists, and Dorn himself were perhaps in their best form in the series thus far. While we got to see a fair bit of the actual defense organization and action on Terra, it was how the Dorn and his sons responded to the Alpha Legion that really earned by upmost respect. They were out-manuevered a lot, sometimes too slow, and sometimes just quick enough, and paid for it fairly heavily. But through those trials and tribulations I think I definitely grew to like the sons of Dorn, at least as much as any die hard Iron Warriors fan can admit to. I think a large part of it came with our title character Archamus, the Master of Dorn's Huscarls. He was truly admirable, and possessed enough wit and personality to really endear me to him. The flash back scenes really did wonders to not only build his character, but to build Dorn's as well, and it was handled masterfully.

The novel was a stellar showcase of Mr. French's talents, and it was an absolute delight to read. While I

definitely went in expecting some good Imperial Fist and Alpha Legion action, I did not expect to have a new entry on my all-time favourite books. Mr. French, I hope I am able to cross the pond and get another signature from you sometime soon, because this masterpiece really deserves it!

Gal Hoshi says

Omegon...

PL says

A well-written piece of solid workmanship. If anything, the author maybe blends a few too many strands of different plots and characters, switching back and forth enough to give the reader a bit of whiplash early on, so either pay attention and keep track of stuff, or read a bit here and there and end up asking yourself "What?" Or ...just go with the flow and not keep track and enjoy it at a lower level of understanding not quite everything and all parts of the plot.

Mr. French obviously has a very impressive resume (see Lexicanum) and knows his source material supremely well. I'm not a huge fan of all of his previous work, but if more like this is coming, I will definitely pay attention. He's no Dan Abnett, perhaps, but a solidly professional story-crafter that deserves your eyeballs.

...Wait, that sounded wrong.

Just read his stuff a bit, forchrissakes. Read something of his, and then make up your own mind, assuming you're a bit of a fan of 40K.

Andrew says

A well written novel with a fantastic story, definitely one of the best Horus Heresy books of recent years. I'm going to go back now and read John French's other work in the series.

Callum Shephard says

Given the Horus Heresy's sheer scale, it was inevitable that certain figures tend to slip through the cracks. Oh, you get retcons to explain away certain ideas, changes to the lore to suit others or even full novels later on, but in many cases certain aspects are conspicuously absent. In this particular case, authors seem to have this habit of playing favourites with certain legions, focusing upon certain ones while others have lacked a true novel to themselves. As such, Imperial Fists supporters were initially elated to see Dorn on the front cover and hoped for a true novel exploring the legion. If you're one of those fans, this might not be the novel you're expecting though.

Holding their ground on Terra, the veterans of the VIIth continue to construct their defences against the impending traitor threat. With Mars still blockaded and the Sol System under threat, the cradle of humanity

has been secured by their long vigil. However, traitor elements have already arrived in strength, and soon inflict more damage than Dorn or Malcador himself could ever predict. With the Alpha Legion inflicting untold damage across the planet, many wonder if even the Praetorian himself can truly guard Terra's gates for much longer.

So, this is less a solo Imperial Fists novel than one following the Alpha Legion and their shadow war with the Fists. While this is sure to put off some readers thanks to the XXth's overexposure in a few novels and their relentless "all your base are belong to us" invincibility. However, Praetorian of Dorn manages to correct many long standing issues, both with the legions and the novel formats themselves. Much of this is down to the author for this book, John French, and the subjects he's most familiar with.

While sadly overlooked compared with the likes of Aaron Dembski-Bowden and Dan Abnett, French is one of Black Library's most reliable authors and displays a clear understanding of how to use flaws or failure; something which was a prominent theme in his Ahriman trilogy. However, despite this he never repeats Betrayal's mistake of examining or exaggerating these flaws until they are a non-threatening joke of an army; never losing sight of what made them such an effective force in the first place. Oh the Alpha Legion breach the Fists' defences easily enough and unleash a blistering sequence of diversionary tactics, but the Fists quickly recover quickly enough and even turn this act against them. This keeps the reader guessing who might come out worse from this fight, and a few surprising deaths helps to reinforce this uncertainty. Really, there are some big name characters who meet their end here, and you won't see it coming until the very end.

What's more interesting however, is how the book is structured. Even more so than many of the bigger and bulkier tomes, this proves to be a story of stories, weaving a very complex and layered multi-story arc. From the very beginning, we have a broad spectrum of individual tales across the Sol System, from the slums to a cargo vessel, setting things up for the expected diverse series of stories. Or we do, at least until there is a remarkable bait and switch which perfectly reflects Alpha Legion tactics. Equally, at first the Fists themselves are shown only following a single narrative thread which seems ready to fail, only for it to immediately override many of the others, countering and blocking them as they come up against it. The very narrative structure of the book is worked and woven to reflect their tactical doctrines, even as it explores themes of pride, duty, stagnation and paranoia. It's something which is hard to truly pick up upon at first, but it's a subtle edge which makes the book stand out all the more. Especially when it starts to shift to reflect their own innate failings and shifting tactics.

So, we've spoken a great deal about the story structure and how it presents its forces, but what about the world and its characters? Well, it's a John French novel. As such, it relies upon upon certain detailed actions and building a very distinct atmosphere than the sorts of lengthy, world building, descriptions you might expect. This is sure to be a make or break point for many readers, as many locations can seem oddly nebulous or indistinct at times, and it lacks some of the vivid imagery which other authors have long since mastered. However, the book overcomes this thanks to its complex and diverse protagonists and how it presents them. Rather than a single hero, we follow a single figure from each legion, each following a more unconventional approach to what we would expect.

Neither is your common or garden example from either legion, or even the pinnacle of what they are capable of, and this allows them to reflect upon some of the stranger aspects of the VII and XX. Through their eyes we see a different shade of the forces we're used to, which goes a long way to adding more life to these legions, but also to the characters themselves. We often see them in conflict or communication with the upper echelons of their respective forces, and in playing off one another the reader is given a better sense of where they stand. Even if that were not enough, we also have some quite extensive flashbacks to their lives, from their initiation to rising through the ranks. While each is extensive, practically a brilliant short story in their own right, French manages to prevent them bringing the narrative to a screeching halt by placing them during lulls in the action or where a time-skip is needed. It's one of an exceptionally small number of novels which can truly pull off this stunt.

Best all of all however, Praetorian of Dorn reflects one of the best ways to truly depict a protagonist. We never see things through Dorn's eyes, we never fully get inside his head until quite late on, and for the most part we see him through others. Oh, we learn details about him and his personality, but it gives him an edge of mystery. It's that aspect of separation which can make a character all the more engaging when done well, especially when they're shown to be so much more powerful than the average human. It's one reason why, until Paul Cornell's excellent works, we never saw inside the Doctor's head in Doctor Who.

Oddly enough, Praetorian of Dorn's problems lie more in its length and focus more than anything else. While offering an extremely strong middle, much of the start proves to be oddly chaotic at first, and the reader is dropped into a bewildering forest of separate sub-plots all at once. While they are quickly sorted out, it can leave a reader confused for the first fifty pages, or forced to go back and re-try the book's opening segments more than once. What's more, the final few chapters seem oddly sparse, almost rushed in how they were presented. While featuring some very interesting twists - and one of the best duels the series has had to date - the events about them were dragged out, almost to the point of padding in some places.

Many of the human characters also suffer in the presence of the astartes, and French's style of writing sadly rarely favoured them. While the man can certainly nail the ultra-disciplined and controlled approach of the astartes, and even highly trained operatives, it does not work half as well with the Imperium's more common denizens. Even then, a few secondary characters who leave a big impact by founding certain later chapters seem to have been boiled down to their bare essentials at times. They're not so much the men who might forge these armies as amalgamations of their best qualities, and this is only occasionally offset by some quite memorable conversations.

However, the big one which is likely to stand out more than anything else is how surprisingly small scale the whole book can seem. While this is certainly a shadow war, the massive opening strike and sheer immensity of some of the initial terror attacks never seemed to resonate within the book. Despite the Alpha Legion using relatively small teams, they unleash an assault so large that, at first, the Imperial Fists believe that the Warmaster's invasion has started early. However, so little is done to truly reflect upon this, or depict the damage in detail, that their efforts lack the narrative punch they definitely need. It makes many events outside of direct combat almost ineffectual when it comes down to it.

Still, while it is hindered by a few obvious flaws, Praetorian of Dorn is still a definite success. As the latest in a winning streak of great novels for this franchise, what we get marches the story further along, provides some shocking twists, a few new details, but isn't afraid to try something new. Even if you're not a fan of the Fists or are perhaps even a little jaded when it comes to the Alphas, this is still highly recommended and proof French definitely needs to be commissioned for more novels in this series. So long as he's kept far away from Perturabo, it seems there is little he can do wrong.

Jorel says

Wow.... This book, alongside Path of Heaven, stands as the best Horus Heresy novels ever since the first trilogy. Fans of both the Imperial Fists and the Alpha Legion will specially love it! It has a lot of flashbacks and different points of view, but for me i was able to connect them very thoroughly and it made this whole concise picture of the Imperial Fists and the Alpha Legion, and how it would play out in the end. The great "strategic" surprise in the end i was already expecting, but oh boy when it happened, me as an Imperial Fist fan, almost celebrated it out loud. And then in the actual end of the novel you have one of the greatest events since the start of the series.

The prose was very good as well, and it was a real page turner. All in all, THIS was the novel all the Imperial

Fists fans were expecting. And John French DID deliver!

Andrew Ziegler says

Damn. I have a lot to say. This is the first incarnation of Dorn that really gave him some character. Of course it did not make the IF Legion any deeper than they had been before. The Alpha Legion remains one of the most intriguing characters, if you can consider them as a OnE. And they would want you to! I spent most of the book infuriated by how easy everything was for the AL. I was enraged most of the time by the constant losing. The moment the Phalanx and Dorn showed up i did nothing but sprint to the end with a smile on my face. The death of a Primarch was crazy. That hasnt happened in like, I dunno, 30+ novels! Lol. I was waiting for it all to be a trick but that epilogue seemed to cement that Alpharius is dead and only Omegon remains. Even now I am unsure of that statement. How could anyone but a primarch stand toe to toe with a primarch, unless you are part demon prince like that giant C Lucius the sword master? Alpharius has to be dead! Right? Great novel. Bring on the end!!!

Marc Collins says

Praetorian of Dorn is John French's first true novel for the Heresy and it showcases exactly why he is one of Black Library's greatest authors and Games Workshop's greatest assets.

French manages to work in references and asides to so much of his sweeping Heresy short form work, as well as his notable contributions to the Forge World rule books for tabletop Heresy. He commits them to the page with an almost historical relish, to the point that it's a novel that would almost benefit from footnotes.

Combined with this is a sweeping plot of war and intrigue, a sign of just how far the Alpha Legion can go and what they can accomplish. They run the gamut from agents and saboteurs to being at the cutting edge of their game as transhuman soldiers. French captures the Alpha Legion at war in all it's terrifying glory, crafting action that surpasses the previous gold standard set by Rob Sanders in "The Harrowing."

Paranoia rules this novel, soaked into every page. The revelations of just how far the Alpha Legion extend their reach is masterfully handled; all the way from early symbolism up to its nail-biting end.

The primary narrative is driven by Archamus of Dorn's Huscarl retinue, who gets some really nice meat on his bones thanks to flashbacks which really ground both him and Dorn in the story. While I'm a traitor to my core, and particularly fond of the Hydra, French has kindled an appreciation for the VII which previously extended only as far as the incomparable Sigismund.

All in all, Praetorian of Dorn is a vindication of all of John French's talents; from an Abnettian gift for world-building to a Gouldingesque command of background and it's shaping.

This is a novel that subverts every expectation and delights in it. The perfect novel to usher in the beginning of the end.

Alpha to Omega.

Keamy Loken says

I am not gifted with words or quick witted. I can't describe my feelings, or review literature nearly as well as my sisters. Who manage amazingly to stay unbiased well I often times become over encumbered with what I have dubbed as "my feelz".

Despite my heavy opinions on the subject of Rogal Dorn, Imperial Fists and Horus Heresy (as my url on tumblr will attest to my fangirlness). I can honestly say, John French's work on the Praetorian of Dorn was a masterpiece. He took a bit of unexplored time (the vague years of Rogal Dorn preparing the defense of Terra), and lore and built a unique and compelling story. He managed what few Black Library writers could do, interesting characters, colorful descriptions (that didn't take longer than two pages), powerful story arcs. As well as, a resolved plot that was not drawn out seemingly hundreds of pages longer with bolter porn (Well one as resolved as well as any story where one is facing the Alpha Legion.) French understood in a unique way how to portray Rogal Dorn that did the character justice. The same can be said of his portrayal of the Alpha Legion. Simply great work.

The story is set through several perspectives, the first being our Imperial Fist, Archamus. His charge being to protect the Praetorian of his Legion and Terra during a rather cunning sneak attack from the Alpha Legion. The Alpha Legion narrative is likewise excellently represented and driven on by several well-rounded Alpharius's and a cast of interesting human pawns.

I won't divulge further, but this was a wonderful novel. If I wasn't so shy, I'd most defiantly write French and tell him he is a great writer. Something, I hope he already knows. I hope to see his work continue in other books for Black Library.

Andrey Nalyotov says

And here comes the second greatest HH book of the last 3 years.

Praetorian of Dorn is an amazing book, utterly marvellous, but which drops just 1 point from becoming a masterpiece The Path of Heaven is.

John French has created an epic story of confusion, Legions ideologies, discontent and mainly - he had shown us Legions dreams.

«**It does not need to make sense**» - that's the main promise of this novel. From page to page, up to it's ending - it tries to confuse you and make you rethink all you thought before.

Being a novel with a lot of AL in it, it's all about the ideology clash - clash between zealotry (IF) and free thinking (AL); structure/order (IF) against anarchy and evolution (AL). As one of the main protagonists said: «*Yes, pride is certainly a factor, but what the Alpha Legion have done is more than saying "I am better than you". They are shouting – "I am better and cleverer than you, and I am so clever and dangerous that I can tell you I am here". This is not just pride. It is validation.*»

You think Praetorian of Dorn is a novel (really big one) about Imperial Fists Legion? Which at last took the central stage!

Meep - WRONG!

This novel from the uber talented writer, is full hilt, tilt and pepper an Alpha Legion novel.

Imperial Fists have their moments to shine especially in flashbacks to the long past of the Great Crusade era, but it's all about the XXth Legion. As serpents shed their skin - so AL protagonists in this novel made the changes, interpret orders, shed their identities and do the stuff 'serpents' do best - create confusion, dissolve the order and win the central place on stage, by moving in the shadows :)

Even at moments of resolution, moments of choice on a crossroad - AL always have a plan. With what even

the IF agree:

«Either way they are trapped... 'Never a wise assumption to make with the Alpha Legion,' ...

They had a contingency... - Always a fair assumption to make with the Alpha Legion'»

So - let's get from point to point.

Writing style/structure As with everything written by John, it is a strict but borderless narrative, with great portions of suspense and attitude to the unknown (as also showed by an author in his Cthulhu and other horror/W40K/HH tales). The dialogs are masterfully grafted into the narrative and some of them truly shine and makes this #39 title in the HH, one of the best yet in all the series. At the same time - John was always strong in chronologist style of writing. Lot of his stories has a flavor of chronicles in them. Which is good, cause don't know about you, but I like chronologic events. In my case, they add some old and historic aspect to any story. Plus, it's easier to comprehend the grand event. Some subtitles and excerpts will make you shiver, like:

The interstellar gulf beyond the light of Sol. Dark blade silently glide in the darkness... or Outer system defences have fallen... Ships from the dark. They are here. They have come....

Or this one - at the point I read it, I wasn't able to put the novel down:

«They were destroyers of civilisations, the Legion's killing edge, and now they were returning to the light of the Solar System.»

Plot Oh, boy - I could talk for a long time here. But to truly comprehend all the stuff that transpired (and especially the ending) you need to be very patient and serious, while you are reading that book. I do not agree with people who say that the flashbacks in that novel break the structure and are simply a filler. They are not. Each flashback (especially Archamus) state some great turning points in ideology of Imperium and it's 2 Legions (VIIth and XXth). Even flashbacks that simply describe a butchery of orcs and fortifications building - provide a serious feedback on why Imperial Fists are made the way they are. To be a warrior - is not simply to have an ability to destroy. You also need to have an ability to create and face the results of your choices.

With what I agree - is that this novel 'structure' in general a flawed. That's why sometimes it seems that not interconnected events are randomly put into the narrative. Same happened with the previous John novels - so, no surprise here. And from my point of view - that's the only reason I don't give this novel a 'masterpiece' status, I did gave to The Path of Heaven.

But that ending... I do like - then authors have the permission to break some old lore and point it into new 'unexplored' direction. The problem is - as with the all happening in the book's plot, we can't know for sure, if that's really happened to that antagonist or what the repercussions would be.

Characters One of the strongest points of this novel. As this book was intended to be a stepping stone into the life and history of the VIIth Legion - you got greatly explained Rogal Dorn nature, via the eyes of his Legion, his closest huscarl Archamus and via the eyes and information nets of the 'serpents'. From my humble point of view - that's the best depiction of Rogal so far in the Horus Heresy BL setting. It's utterly prosaic, poetically humble, historically accurate and 'alive'.

Same with his sons and all the people, whom he covered himself with. As an old proverb says: 'I will know you by your friends' - so is the truth of the true nature of the VIIth Primarch.

Assault sergeant Kestros, young Demetrius Katafalque, small flashes of Sigismund and lord seneschal Fafnir Rann, lord castellan Effried - they are just the flowing water over the solid stone block of Dorn's integrity and belief. Especially their naivety (which is outstanding, as Kestros said: «They hide things even from themselves...») and honour.

Even one of the main characters and actual main character of the Imperial Fists for this novel - 'The Last of the First' Archamus totally blinded by the Primarchs personalities. I say Primarchs in plural - because as I said before, that's not an IFs novel, even if it seems that way. The second (I would say the first) true main character of this novel is - Alpharius! And yes he make several appearances as a real (not cloned, copied or hidden) person.

«A figure sat on the throne, hands resting on the chair's arms, the light from the door gleaming off his armour's silver trim. Scales covered the curved plates, and a crest of bronze serpents rose from the crown of his helm. The throne would have been huge for a human, made to amplify the power of those who sat on it. The armoured figure fitted it perfectly, his size and presence making it seem not a throne but a mundane

chair. The emerald hydra on the figure's chest winked reflected light as he inclined his head in greeting.» :)

There are a lot to love about IF's and Hydra here.

We see the Legions behavior and stratagems for a war in all it's glory and horror. Plus we have a great insight into Legions contingencies here. Each division is assessed and operated upon for the reader pleasure.

«The master of the Alpha woke the first hundred of the serpent's children. They had waited for him, long lines of armoured figures lining lightless holds. They were the Lernaean, Terminator-executioners of the Legion.»

And it all ends with a bang!

John French is a true master of characters and painting the shadow dance. Even his secondary characters are alive and truly believable. Especially one great personified-scion of the Selenar, Andromeda-17. Truly outstanding being from the Matriarch Cults of Luna. She is more human than all the actual Imperium citizens are. Curiosity, agile mind, bravery and belief - that list of qualities make her more human than anyone else in the dystopian universe of 30K (mainly in the borders of Imperium of Mankind). One third of the greatest quotes in the novel comes from her:

«We took His mysteries and all of the hardy half-feral stock He could drag from the hell-holes of Terra and the ruins of His wars, and made warriors to conquer more worlds in turn. We bought survival by making the weapons by which He would kill others. We turned your kind from armies into Legions.»

Also, John masterfully depicted the life of all the societies that actually create the Imperium in Solar system. From the Jovian void clans, Genetech cults of Luna, Solar Auxilia, Aventians, Scavenger captains and vairoseans to the great majority of grey humanity, who is a backbone of the Master of Mankind interstellar Empire. They all live, grow, struggle and die upon the bones of millennia old civilisations and cultures.

«But the Solar System was a big place, crowded with emptiness and secrets from millennia of civilisation and catastrophe.»

The ending was, in my humble opinion, outstandingly brilliant. It gave the reader some answers, but at the same time has asked a lot of questions. Answers to which we will read or see only in the future. But the road to the epilogue could be described with a quote from one Solar Auxilia general:

«That depends if your definition of bad includes bringing closer the possibility of dying or having something shot or hacked off you»

All in all Praetorian of Dorn is a novel about the battle of ideologies. Eagle vs serpent; unbreakable stone vs chaotic change; stagnation vs progress. It is a great book with cool story, 'live' characters, changeable setting and great epilogue :)

I could use a lot of titles and frazes here - but it's doesn't change the fact that John French has written a truly amazing book.

Read it, start reading it now - if you like HH, you will not regret your spent time.

I would give this book a well deserved 5 stars, even if it's lost, by a small margin, the status of a masterpiece. And I will end this one big review with 2 quotes - one from the Fists and one from the Hydra. You chose which one belongs to whom :)

«And what of the future we were to build, lord. Will it be built in the ashes of our honour?»

«We have already won... We won years ago. It is merely a question of the shape of that victory.»

Milo (BOK) says

John French's *Praetorian of Dorn* shines a much-needed spotlight on the Imperial Fists, who have up until this point been often ignored by the Horus Heresy writers team. As we enter the late stages of the Heresy itself, it was a good choice to focus on the Fists as the protectors of Terra, and whilst the book risks crumbling under its own weight with plenty of intricate subplots and characters, French finds a way to balance them effectively, also spending time with Alpharius to give us one of the most memorable showdowns in the Horus Heresy in a while.

The book feels more espionage orientated and that is no surprise with the involvement of the Alpha Legion. It reads as the prologue to the invasion of Terra, the calm before the storm if you will, and the way things play out is fascinating to watch unfold. French is certainly a gifted Black Library writer and I'm looking forward to reading more of his works. This is definitely one of the best Horus Heresy novels I've read from the more recent crop of releases, and its character work is one of its biggest strengths here. There's so much attention to the lore and detail that fans will love, and French excels in bringing it all to page in a way that never feels overstuffed.

The world-building is fantastic. Terra needed to be fleshed out more and developed as a world before the conflict on its surface and French succeeds in doing so expertly, bringing a fantastic look and feel to the world that helps it feel all the more immersive. I'd definitely recommend this book if you get the chance to pick it up - I've been catching up on the Black Library books that I've missed from the past few years of not reading much WH40K/Fantasy related, and *Praetorian of Dorn*, coupled with a recent read in *Corax*, felt like an excellent place to return to with Black Library's flagship series.

Gianfranco Mancini says

Well, at last war arrived at the gates of Terra and Sol system.

The Hydra strikes with all of its power, mischief, paranoia, sleeper cells buried (litterally) years before of the Heresy, spec-ops operatives, slumbering legionaries with fragments of memories, orders and protocols activating at specific command words, and with the frightening military strength of the Astartes.

At first I didn't liked much the confusing web of infinite characters and sub-plots threatening to crush this novel under their weight (like it happened in *Vengeful Spirit*), and how Dorn, Archamus and the Imperial Fists were shadowed by the overwhelming stage-presence of the XX Legion, but in those final 70 pages, real page-turning ones who kept me awake last night until 3 a.m., John French pulls for good all the threads, giving us some light on Alpharius' motivations and gifting the reader with one of the best duels and endings of the Horus Heresy saga.

And the scarce stage presence of the VII Legion in the central part of the novel just add more weight and pathos when the Phalanx runs to Pluto and stoic Rogal Dorn loses his temper at last.

Timeline moved fast forward with an Harrowing this time, and the end never been so near.

I AM ALPHARIUS
