



Duty Calls

Sandy Mitchell

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While assisting local forces quell widespread civil disorder, Commissar Cain and his regiment of Valhallans discover sinister forces are at work behind the scenes. With a rioting populace, aliens on the rampage, and the Inquisition poking their noses everywhere, how can the wily commissar ever find the easy life he prefers?

Duty Calls Details

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Dylan says

This book was pretty fun. Lots of Inquisitorial shenanigans that made me really want to play more Dark Heresy (one of the 40k RPGs). I don't have much else to say actually... it's more Commissar Cain, with all the tropes and cliches of the previous 4 books in the series. Good to see Inquisitor Vail come back though, she's an interesting character.

Jeffrey Nolan says

It's been a few years since I read a Ciaphas Cain novel, but this was my least favorite of the series so far. The novel felt stale. Although not surprising, the overall structure was very similar to the previous novels, and even dialog from Cain felt quite repetitive. The number of times Cain would say something along the lines of "knowing what I know now, I never would have done XYZ due to the danger it would place me in."

Overall a disappointing novel. The first two Ciaphis Cain novels were my favorite, and my enjoyment of them declined since then. It's less that the quality of the novels have gotten worse and more that they are all so similar to each other.

I still own Cain's Last Stand, so I may consider reading that in the future, but if I didn't already own the next book it's unlikely I would be motivated to by the next one.

Carlos Arsenio Garcia says

It felt a little rushed at the end but it's still good stuff.

Mark Austin says

The Cain novels are like pulp action/war movies - you know the hero is going to survive, there's going to be some plot twist, he's going to have a moment where he almost dies and either survives through an ingenious plan or the cavalry showing up, and happily ever inevitable sequel(s).

The Cain novels are this in 40k.

Sandy keeps the writing interesting, though not always fresh. Cain is secretly completely self-interested, Jurgen smells bad and has infinite pockets, the melta gun is heavy, bulky, produces an actinic glare when fired, and Cain drinks tanna tea... etc.

If you're looking for character development, growth, and change, look further. If you want light, entertaining war action set in a grimdarkness future of onlywar, these are worth a read.

Christian says

I'm getting used to the formula of *Britishers in Space*. This novel pits the Imperial Guard against Tyranids against Chaos with Inquisition betrayal. It was a fun read.

Adam Whitehead says

A planet-wide insurrection has broken out on Periremunda, necessitating the deployment of the Imperial Guard to the planet to help crush it. The Valhallan 597th is part of the deployment, along with its increasingly legendary commissar, Ciaphas Cain, hero of the Imperium. As usual, Cain hopes for a quiet, simple assignment where he can sit out the trouble, and also as usual he finds himself instead at the cutting edge of danger. This time, a simple rebellion is revealed to mask a whole number of other threats which Cain and his ever-faithful aide Jurgen have to deal with. In this case, operations are complicated by Periremunda's unique geography, a world of burning, uninhabitable deserts with settled plateaus rising above them.

Duty Calls is the fifth Ciaphas Cain novel and, disappointingly, is a little bit of a let-down after the terrific *Death or Glory*. The good news is that we are reunited with the Valhallans 597th and also with Inquisitor Amberley Veil and her retinue of demented allies. The bad news is that Mitchell has seriously dialled down the humour and amusing references in this book. There are a few (mostly restricted to the footnotes and the extracts from General Sulla's ludicrously bombastic memoirs that provide a commentary on events where Cain is not present), but this is a more serious novel than its predecessors.

Not that this is a bad thing. Mitchell is great at describing the action which is the cornerstone of any Warhammer 40,000 novel, and is also solid at handling horror and drama as well as the traditional black humour of the books. So whilst *Duty Calls* won't have you laughing as much as its predecessor, it's still a solid and readable action-adventure tale, refreshingly short and to the point with a good line in characterisation. Whilst the book's main storyline is self-contained, some dangling storylines are picked up from *Death or Glory* and carried through to the next book in the series, Cain's *Last Stand*, resulting in the sense of bigger events unfolding outside of this one conflict.

Mitchell has created an interesting world in Periremunda and describes its scenery and geography with gusto. Elsewhere the book suffers from perhaps a tad too much reliance on the Ciaphas Cain formula - Cain is bluff and cowardly but emerges a hero, whilst Jurgen and his melta gun and psi-inhibiting abilities save the day more than once - as well as a sense of plot overload. As well as the rebellion, Mitchell also jams in genestealers, Chaos cults, a renegade Inquisitor and a meeting with a particularly fanatical branch of the Sisters of Battle. As a result some elements are under-developed. The planetary arbitrator goes from being a major character at the start to virtually vanishing altogether, whilst Cain's ideological clash between his pragmatism and the Sisters' idealism is never developed to its full potential.

Still, even slightly sub-par Cain remains highly entertaining and readable. *Duty Calls* (**½) is available now as part of the *Defender of the Imperium* omnibus in the UK and USA.

Jeffrey says

It's been a while since I've posted a review. I was going to try and post reviews for everything I read!

Ambitious, but unrealistic. I don't even answer my emails in a timely fashion.

Anyway, 'Duty Calls' is another entertaining addition to Sandy Mitchell's Ciaphas Cain series, chronicling the exploits and accidental heroism of the reluctant protagonist.

Do I feel a little embarrassed that I'm reading mass market science fiction?

Apparently not.

Next to the Horus Heresy series and Dan Abnett's books for Games Workshop, Mitchell's series is tops.

Angel says

It took me a while to get through this one, but it was mostly because I have been reading other things, not a reflection of the book, which was excellent. Mitchell kept the excitement running all the way to the end making you wonder if the wily commissar would make it out alive. This is certainly a fine addition to the Ciaphas Cain series.

In this series, the commissar and his Valhallans have to help quell civil disturbances in Periremunda. However, the situation turns out to be much more complicated than just some riots and civil unrest. It seems there may be an active Chaos cult or two behind the scenes. And what is the interest of the Inquisition, which seems to be a very active interest? And all happening while there is a Tyranid invasion going on. Will Commissar Cain be able to make it out in one piece and find the easy life he so likes? Maybe, maybe not as he once again, albeit reluctantly, becomes the hero of the day. Life is not easy for the commissar who knows that once you have a reputation, you have to maintain it, and his reputation is that of a hero of the Imperium.

Mitchell takes us into the story right away from the beginning, reveals the plots and the intricacies a bit at a time, and the tale does not let you go until you reach the end. Sure, this is military scifi, but it is military scifi with humor in it; these books are really fun to read. I am already looking forward to the next installment.

Tyler says

More of the same from the Ciaphas Cain series: Jurgen smells, Cain would've "gladly waked into the Eye of Terror" or whatever if he "knew what was coming," Amberly adds filler, etc. Good thing I always like all that. Also there's Chaos space Hitler.

Johnny says

The Harry Flashman of the *Warhammer 40K* universe is back (indeed, he thinks he is "behind the lines" so to speak) in *Duty Calls*, the second book of the second Ciaphas Cain trilogy. Unlike the second film of the "second" (actually released "first") *Star Wars* trilogy, *Duty Calls* is more like *Attack of the Clones* ("second" film of the "first" but released "second" trilogy?) than *The Empire Strikes Back*. This is not to say that *Duty Calls* isn't entertaining. It is rife with assassination attempts, subterfuge, betrayal, and plenty of well-crafted

battle scenes. It is well worth reading even as *Attack of the Clones* was worth watching because the good parts outweigh its disappointments (the horrid casting with regard to the romantic sections with regard to the film and the loss of humor in the footnotes from Amberley (the inquisitor from the Ordo Xenos) compared to the first volume and pacing in the novel).

Pacing, of course, is a personal issue. Everyone has an opinion about what that should be like and opinions are as ubiquitous as ...well...as that tasteless comment about how everyone has an anus. So, I should probably explain my comment about pacing. For me (notice the subjective disclaimer in that seeming innocuous opening), a story with a good pace has an overall objective such that it seems like the protagonist(s) are making progress toward it at all times *unless* they are detoured by plot difficulties and subplots. Even then, though, I (again with the very first-person reference) feel like the protagonist(s) should feel the tension, frustration, or despair of being sidetracked or hindered from making progress toward that objective.

Duty Calls has a fascinating ending that portends greater things and a bigger obstacle in the future (it literally foreshadows a major product release in the miniatures line related to the *Warhammer 40K* universe that was released prior to my interest in this shared setting, but I can't reveal the exact product without spoiling an intriguing ending to this book). Sandy Mitchell (aka Alex Stewart) does a fine job of letting the reader know that this particularly conclusion is "out there, somewhere" but the means by which Cain is thrust into the climax of the story seems haphazard at best. Further, the main antagonist force in this book (the Tyranids [the *Warhammer 40K* "codex" spells this differently than I would, but it's their universe!]) is prone to infest a planet from a myriad of directions, so it is difficult to create a coherent plan of attack that is proactive as opposed to reactive. The military plan used by the Imperials in this novel is aimed more at containment and entrapment than searching and destroying, so it seems like more than half of the book is preparing for the inevitable major thrust while the characters one cares about are floundering about in the dark. To be fair, they aren't floundering; they are making cogent command decisions. However, they are dealing with a dearth of military intelligence and that makes things uncertain (though, as Nassim Taleb claims in *The Black Swan*, sometimes intel creates its own flaws). Handled perfectly, that uncertainty would create tension. For me (ah, the arrogance of the amateur critic), this wasn't handled perfectly and proved a source of irritation where I hoped the author would start bringing the web-like tendrils of the plot together.

Once the plot web begins to get sticky (too close to the end for *my* taste), it is well worth reading. I believed the villainous (and not wholly unexpected) antagonist/betrayer but would have liked to have been able to get into that individual's "head" a little sooner. I don't know how one does that when the literary conceit of the novel is a memoir, but there are ways. Unfortunately, the opportunities of weaving the kind of information I would desire into the narrative would have forced Amberley or General Zyvan to have stepped off of their high-Chimeras (I guess those tanks would be the equivalent of "horses.") of "need-to-know" and revealed something of use to our "hero." Still, I'm planning to read the third installment of this trilogy soon and if the series has taken away the bad taste in my mouth I received from the *Deathwatch* novel.

Mary Catelli says

Reviewed in the omnibus *Ciaphas Cain: Defender of the Imperium*

Paulo "paper books always" Carvalho says

This is the fifth book I read from Sandy Mitchell and Commissar Ciaphas Cain and his fateful sidekick Jurgen.

Again he returns to kick some Tyranids butts...

You've got Cain and Jurgen in Periremunda to quench a supposedly chaos riot. BUT because one enemy is not enough they soon discover that they are in the route of an invasion of Tyranids. OF COURSE, this was not enough and Cain and Jurgen have to deal with the Inquisition as well.

Not as fast as other books in my opinion and after reading 6 books by him I must say that my favourite one was also the smaller one. Caves of Ice.

I think that most of this story could have been told with 256 pages or something like that. Too much fillers and at times it feel I was reading things that happened in other books.

Nevertheless, a good addition if you like Ciaphas Cain and Jurgen. If you have read the last four books you are by now used to him (Ciaphas) and the author way of telling stories so you will enjoy this one as well. If you are new to this... you will not be lost but in my opinion start with Caves of Ice (even if it the second published).

Cat says

This is a reread after roughly 4 or 5 years.

Ciaphas Cain is a clever antihero and the narrative (along with Vail's footnote commentary and inserts of relative information into the archive) is refreshingly candid, as well as hilarious. All of the books in this series are worth the read.

Andy says

Ciaphas Cain finds himself in the middle of a political and civil skirmish on Periremunda, and discovers an evil scheme designed to bring the wrath of the tyranids to the plateaus of the planet. Not as humorous as the previous four Cain novels, but no less enjoyable as the mounting tension present from the soon to be arriving 'nids mixes well with the chemistry Cain exhibits with Amberley Vail, Jurgen, and other well-developed characters. Part of the great lure of this line of books is Cain's reluctance to be the heroic leader and yet somehow escaping long odds of survival and coming out smelling like a White Rose. The descriptions of swarming tyranids near the end of the book is frightening, told from Cain's point of view in an escaping shuttle overhead as he once again dodges the proverbial lascannon.

Dave says

A quality finish to the Ciaphas Cain series...recommended! You don't need to have read all the other books

in this series to get this one, but if you read the 4th book, it'll help as there are a lot of references to that one in this one...
