



The Soul Drinkers Omnibus

Ben Counter

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Like all Space Marine Chapters, the Soul Drinkers are bound to serve the Imperium by ancient vows. But when an ancient relic of the Chapter is misappropriated, the Soul Drinkers face a terrible dilemma - betray the Imperium, or lose their honour? Their final choice, and its consequences, form the theme of this classic trilogy of SF stories set in the nightmare world of the 41st millennium.

The Soul Drinkers Omnibus Details

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From Reader Review The Soul Drinkers Omnibus for online ebook

?????? ??????? says

this is one misunderstood chapter (although half of them turned traitor) its like chaos (loyalist) vs chaos (traitors) its really fun concept.

Daniel Stewart says

The soul drinkers series in its entirety has the feeling of being rushed.

Take a concept: Create a group who will serve to show the imperium (the "good" guys) for all of its flaws; the imperium is an excellent villain in WH40k.

The concept piqued my interest, and the author had credit with me as one of the good 40k writers (Grey Knights, Galaxy in Flames and so on) but these books just don't have the quality I've come to known of Counter's.

There is so much deus ex machina/"And then they got what they needed" in every book, and most of the characters lack in interest for me.

If you really absolutely must read this book, buy a used copy from your local bookstore.

Callum Shephard says

The Soul Drinkers series is one which is generally either hated or held in low regard. While not as universally reviled as the things produced by Goto it's definitely has more arguing its flaws than praising what it gets right. While many problems can be excused by various fan theories and ideas, there's little to deny the execution was less than stellar. Much of this comes down to Ben Counter himself flip-flopping on the direction it would take and the conclusion more than anything else. That being said, it's rarely judged fairly. Few critics ever seem to reference any events beyond the final pages of Soul Drinker however, so how it the trilogy as a whole? Let's find out.

Soul Drinker

As the opening stated, introduction to the series isn't that good. While not the worst thing Black Library has ever published it has very distinct problems in pacing, direction and general logic.

Set in the dying days of the forty-first millennium (no change there) the Soul Drinkers are active throughout the Imperium. A fleet based chapter with a glorious history, their acts have been well documented and their deeds remembered. From the dark days of the Second Founding to helping end the mad reign of Goge Vandire, they have fought to defend humanity from the horrors both within and without.

Yet for the first time in thousands of years they find themselves with an opportunity to regain that which was

lost.

The Soul Spear, prized weapon of Rogal Dorn himself has been uncovered on a rogue star fortress among a collection of relics. Racing to take back this artifact of a bygone age, the Soul Drinkers do not realise that they are being easily manipulated for greater goals...

The crux of the problem here is in the introduction. You know the Soul Drinkers are being manipulated right from the start and it's increasingly clear that it's not by natural forces. It's not long before this reaches the point where you desperately want someone to jump into the narrative yelling "**YOU'RE ALL BEING DUPED!**" Preferably while punching Sarpedon, the protagonist, in the face. While some ignorance might have been acceptable due to distractions and what we learn later on it definitely could have been better handled.

Up to the point where Sarpedon duels their Chapter Master their actions are just about believable. After they start gaining mutations, calling them blessings of the Emperor, it's much harder to accept. This isn't helped by many of the often mind-numbingly bland characters.

The cast needed to either show aspects which could be latched onto for Chaos to influence them or sympathetic personalities. Ones diverse or varied enough to keep interest amongst the marines, but we don't really have either here. While Luko, Lygris, Graevus and Tellos work well others like Pallas, Sarpedon, Givrillian and others do not. This is especially problematic as many require you to care about them or at least appreciate what they are saying, especially in Sarpedon's case. He's written some sort of warrior philosopher you're never given a real reason to care about him or want him to succeed. While his actual decisions, fights and thoughts might be interesting he lacks that edge to make him truly interesting. Unfortunately many of the non-astartes secondary characters are no better, either seeming very bland or come across as blanks. The captains of the ships, Arch Magos Khobotov and the minor sects worshipping the Architect of Fate all lack any real attachment. Some have aspects which should work but they aren't pushed far enough.

The problem with the limited characterisation is that Counter tends to give every character a history. While this can help to make the universe feel bigger, it tends to bog down the narrative and doesn't really add to them. Worse still, the same thing goes the same way for the Soul Drinkers chapter itself. The army was retconned into being a creation of the Second Founding, specialises in boarding actions and has a unique doctrine they follow. For all this nothing is really given to set them apart from any other force. Had this been intentional, showing even an extremely codex adherent chapter falling easily, this might have worked, but the Soul Drinkers are an atypical force within the imperium. The only time when this is used effectively is one particular Chaos champion, largely due to the author's descriptive capabilities with mutations and unnatural phenomena.

It's clear why many people dislike the series if this was their introduction. Both with continually awkwardly shifting in locations, predictability and weaponised plot driven stupidity it's a rather poor novel. Despite some good action, fast pacing and some genuinely great one liners it's a bad introduction into a much better saga.

The Bleeding Chalice

Following on only months after their battles against the daemonic forces of Ve'Meth and Abraxes the Soul Drinkers find themselves on the verge of annihilation. Though no longer blinded to the force which manipulated their succession from the Imperium, they find their bodies corrupted and mutations rampant within their ranks.

With over a quarter of their marines dead and their gene-seed too unstable to replenish their numbers, Sarpedon is forced to lead his chapter into a warzone. With records suggesting a cure to their plight can be found within the sector they must avoid the traitor forces which have carved out a minor empire within the Imperium.

Almost every aspect of the book from its overall tone to its characterisation of the forces involved has been vastly improved. The difference in quality is effectively day and night and were this the first novel to the series the Soul Drinkers books would likely be much more highly regarded. Right from the beginning you understand how different the book will be when the primary Imperial character and Soul Drinkers are introduced. They're more rounded, written far more as humans and have minor details and character quirks which help them stand out beyond their role and rank. None are effected by the virulent brain cell eating virus which was apparently spreading through the last book.

The very fact Sarpedon doesn't try to storm the entire warzone and take it by force is proof enough of this but if you also get him reflecting upon some of his actions here. While he never says he's wrong and still considers the Imperium to be too corrupt to be worth serving, he never tries to justify being duped by Abraxes. Furthermore a few of his thoughts come across as much more human and understandable here, especially considering the Soul Drinkers' desperation. This improved characterisation definitely helps the book's themes and makes its much darker tone all the more real.

The Soul Drinkers' are no longer completely in the right and many of their actions stand the chance of doing as much damage as they do good. As such rather than overly zealous fanatics or officials motivated by greed, many Imperial forces they oppose start becoming more sympathetic. Inquisitor Thaddeus is one such example and is a vast improvement over Chloure or Khobotov; along with being far more an investigator and even handed in his judgements. While driven to perform some questionable acts he is called out on such actions and his behaviour in the final chapters shows a surprising degree of flexibility. For a force which was last seen ignoring the theft of a primarch's weapon and declaring a chapter excommunicate traitoris at the drop of a hat, this is a far more balanced portrayal.

Another vast improvement, again with the characters, is with the novel's antagonist Teturact. While Ve'Meth, Khobotov and Abraxes only served their purpose as villains, Teturact is a character. He has a background, motivations which make him stand out from them and while occasionally veering into cliché he is far more memorable due to his presence. He also serves a role as both a dark reflection of the Soul Drinkers, what they could become if they did embrace Chaos, and of the Imperium's much darker secrets.

The characters which previously stood out continue to remain decent here. While not outstanding they feel like they have more of a dimension than the others, having been more clearly established and fleshed out as characters. At the same time the writing quality with the others seems to have caught up with them and those like Pallas and the newly introduced Salk feel like they're worthy of focus. A few previous strengths are overlooked to accommodate this new focus, most notably Tellos who is pushed into a background role, but these mostly consist of characters whose arcs are over.

Despite the improved writing the pacing is excellently done. It's easy to find yourself racing through the endgame of events on Stratix Lumine before you realise you're well over halfway through the book. Similarly the descriptions and battles remain as good as ever with some nightmarish ideas and details being given to the reader as the usual over the top action and bolter fire erupts onto the pages. In this case imagine Operation Market Garden with zombies and a corrupted Emperor Class battleship.

Overall The Bleeding Chalice generally feels as if it knows what it wants to be. It's a sobering tale in spite of

its more outlandish elements, one dealing with the fallout of the Soul Drinkers' actions and depicting them close to death. It doesn't end on a high note or try to show it as some glorious tale of victories and war. Even when the Soul Drinkers do emerge victorious it is not without severe costs and any celebration of their accomplishments is notably subdued.

Ultimately it is a decent tale and one which shows what the series is capable of when handled correctly.

Crimson Tears

As the last book in the trilogy, Crimson Tears shows the Soul Drinkers still attempting to recover from the wars which have sapped their strength.

Still numbering only five hundred astartes even with the influx of new recruits, the Soul Drinkers have been avoiding many wars in the effort to ensure their survival. Unfortunately for them they are once more forced into battle, this time to ensure their secrecy. Despite having apparently been killed on Stratix Lumine, Tellos and his warriors have re-emerged on a war-torn world where the Imperium is fighting the Dark Eldar. Frenzied and having succumbed to Chaos, they now slaughter everything in their path. Despite this Tellos knew of the chapter's secrets and of their base's layout, something which could give the Imperium an edge it would need in destroying the chapter. Leading the astartes they have left, Sarpedon departs to deal with Tellos once and for all.

The novel is best remembered in the series for how it portrays many factions involved besides the Soul Drinkers. Both the Crimson Fists and Dark Eldar gain details which affect them for both better and worse, but it's the Imperial Guard who benefit the most from the additional focus.

As a force who is wrongly normally presented with the tactic of throwing badly trained troops into meat grinders, they're here shown in a more normal light. Having been gathered together at the last minute to retake the world the crusade consists of various regiments which have not been trained to work together. Ones who while having flaws and problems are not presented as utter incompetents sent in only to clog up the enemy's guns.

Much of this is due to Lord Commander Xarius, a favourite among fans, who is an exception to your usual Imperial Supreme Commander. He values the lives of his men and understands the battlefield but remains a solid and surprisingly human character throughout. One who is desperately trying to hold a failing campaign together even as it falls apart around him, but isn't willing to throw away lives at the drop of a hat.

What's interesting about this is that it works in spite of the obvious use of the Imperials Counter was going for. He presents the campaign as the Imperium as a whole, at least from the Soul Drinkers' perspectives. A force made up of various different regiments of different skills and varying degrees of competence who are all trying to act on their own, even as a single force tries to command them. One which while vital to the overall effort in bringing down their enemies can't keep up with the battle as it takes place due to continual delays and interference. All the while the astartes themselves act as a law unto their own, pursuing their own agendas and often ignoring the force which is supposed to command them. They're loose cannons who seem to have no regard for any overall plan and seem to frequently undermine any effort to effectively combat their enemies as a unified force. Something which is also not helped by the hit and fade tactics the Dark Eldar employ.

Again, this isn't supposed to present the Imperium in any definitive way but instead as the Soul Drinkers' see

them. As a result it does a lot more to flesh out the Imperium from their perspective than we have seen in previous novels and serves as a good criticism. Many of the books in the Black Library are always from an Imperial perspective so it is interesting to see them in a way which could be critical of their tactics while not going “foolish worshippers of the corpse god.” Unfortunately though, some of this came at the cost of others.

While the Crimson Fists are given a rare degree of focus exploring their chapter’s diminished state post-Rynn’s World, the company here feels wrong. Not that they aren’t visibly space marines or act unusually towards traitors, but that they seem to have lost much of their insight. They continually pursue the Soul Drinkers above all other objectives and ignore the Imperial Guard’s war in favour of bringing them down. The problem is that the Crimson Fists are supposed to be a pragmatic chapter. One which would normally be able to keep things in perspective and have more tactical awareness than the average khorne berserker. If their commander, Reinez, had some dishonour to try and overcome or prove the Fists were a capable force even while diminished that would be one thing. The problem is that the novel never gives a powerful enough of a reason for him to be so zealously pursuing them.

The good news is that they’re the only space marines who come across as acting strangely here. The Soul Drinkers themselves behave in a far more sane manner and a few get some surprisingly good character development between events. Chief among these is Luko who, while being certainly likable, was rather one note in previous events and is given a new angle here. It presents something which is unfortunately never fully explored but makes him far more three dimensional than before. In addition to this the squad of Soul Drinkers scouts, led by Eumenes gives a new perspective on events and the chapter itself. Beyond them however we get few developments as Sarpedon remains largely the same and the few insights we get with Chaplain Iktinos don’t quite match up with what we see later.

The violence is handled in a surprisingly different way than before and it really works. The first two novels featured the Soul Drinkers jumping from planet to planet, leaving battlefields as soon as they arrive, but here they’re stuck in one place. It allows Counter to try something different and we see the Soul Drinkers trying to move through the city, lure enemies into traps and outmanoeuvre the enemy rather than just fleeing back into orbit. It’s nothing you’d not expect an army not to do, but it shows they do have more tactical sense than people usually give them credit for.

At the end of the day the novel is extremely mixed with a few good elements holding out despite its flaws. There’s certain enough here to like but periodically you’re going to just raise your eyebrow and wonder “Really? They’re trying that!?” If *The Bleeding Chalice* got you interested enough in the Soul Drinkers then you’ll enjoy this one but just be warned it’s a step down from the previous novel.

Omnibus Conclusion:

Soul Drinkers: Redemption is very much a rollercoaster ride of quality. For everything it gets right it seems to get something else wrong and It will take the series some time to finally even out in terms of writing quality. That being said, despite a sub-par first book the rest of the series is fairly decent with ideas and details which worked. The chapter’s status as renegades is always at the forefront of the stories and you never get the feeling they’re having an easy time or not at risk of destruction. Something which shows how much a chapter needs the Imperium for survival and how risky turning traitor can truly be. If you like the concept behind the series find a few extract of *The Bleeding Chalice* and read through them. If you like what you see give the series a try, otherwise look for a more traditional story about traitors.

Simon says

Like many series from Black Library, the different books are of variable quality - on its own I'd rate #1 as 4-stars, but the other 2 drag it down.

I don't know if it's just laziness on the author's part, or Black Library demanding sequels for successful books asap, but most Black Library series go downhill as the books go on (the Forbeck Blood Bowl novels being an exception, as they started awful and stayed that way).

I like the idea of exploring a Space Marine Chapter (or any other human force) that doesn't follow the Imperium way without being inherently "evil" (as my own Marines did back in my 40k tabletop days), but in the end felt it went to far in the "warped without being Chaotic" path. That said, still more interesting than the "Follow the Emperor"/"Burn the Emperor" that is the standard fare.

Sven Mysterioso says

I'm pretty big into Warhammer 40k. I freely admit that. And that being said, I'm okay with a lot of weirdness and canon-defilement because this is what Games Workshop does.

What Counter does here with this Souldrinker chapter is just not right.

You expect a certain behavior. A certain mindset. In a very real sense, a 40k reader is as psycho-conditioned as one of the Space Marines is supposed to be. They are holy knights who have been sleep-taught and indoctrinated into the faith. They are complete brainwashed zombie types... real true believers.

The Soul Drinkers aren't. In fact, the Soul Drinkers somehow completely ignore 10,000 years of ritual, training, indoctrination and brainwashing. No. They aren't Space marines.

It might be a decent story, but they AREN'T Space Marines. So don't read this looking for Space Marines.

El-jorro says

Soul Drinkers: Redemption tells the tale of a Space Marine Chapter known as the Soul Drinkers. Once loyal servants of the Imperium of Man, the Soul Drinkers come into conflict with their masters over an ancient relic. Refusing to back down, the Soul Drinkers are now renegades and now forge their own path across the cosmos.

The Good:

One thing that is continually stressed in Warhammer 40k is that the Imperium of Man is a terrible place. "The cruellest, bloodiest regime imaginable" as it is stated in the introduction. Human lives are a penny a dozen and violence and misery is all they know for a lot of them. Space Marines do their best but the threats to mankind are innumerable. In order to survive, the Imperium became the brutal dictatorship it is now.

Minor Spoilers: This necessary brutality is illustrated in how easily the Soul Drinkers nearly fall to Chaos in spite of believing that they were following the Emperor's will. Chaos can seep into even the smallest crack in

the mind and soul and the Imperium's need to curtail things like freedom is the only thing standing in the way of madness. A vicious cycle if there ever was one.

Sarpedon is a compelling character in how, despite overwhelming odds against him, he still believes in freedom. Aside from being just another violent band of Chaos Space Marines, the Soul Drinkers, consider themselves still loyal to the Emperor if not to his Imperium. He saw the injustice and corruption that made up the day to day life of the Imperium. Many so called "heretics" see it as well but they are almost always destroyed in the name of the Emperor. Sarpedon, is trying to lead his chapter down a different path as the Emperor intended all those ages ago, but the cure may be just as deadly as the disease. This is an incredibly compelling story and what makes the Soul Drinkers so popular. They are still loyal even though they are considered traitors.

Not to mention a Space Marine with spider legs is pretty darn cool.

The Flaws:

There really aren't that many faults with this book. One of the main ones is that at times, it does seem like the author should have been more generous with the editing as some parts of the narrative seem to drag or become long-winded passages. Being that Warhammer 40k prides itself on its 'epicness' this should not be too surprising.

Common with science fiction, the narrative moves between different characters between chapters. This in off itself is not too bad but it can get a little confusing, especially for a book of this length.

There is also the disclaimer in that it is a pretty violent book.

Final Verdict:

Soul Drinkers is a worthy addition to the Universe of Warhammer 40k and offers a unique story, that is one all its own, as Sarpedon intended.

Five out Five Stars.

Ross says

The tale of the Soul Drinkers chapter is another pleasing break from storming the battlements in the name of the Imperium of Man without question, but it somewhat lacks in a convincing motivation in places.

The first book of the series is pretty standard Space Marine fare, charge into battle after battle against the forces of chaos, with the difference of the Soul Drinkers being excommunicated, which sort of happens in the background. That part was confusing, their excommunication more or less "just happens" and they just accept it and move on to their next challenge - forgetting the key objective which led to their excommunication in the first place, which was hard to rationalize. *spoiler* In the end it is revealed that they were tampered with by a daemon prince of Tzeentch, which was pretty clearly the only "explanation" possible, but begs the question that if it is so easy to subvert a space marine chapter, how are any of them left loyal at all? Also, the early plot sort of over emphasizes the scarcity of teleporter technology in the 40k

universe, which in modern 40k is not really the case. (2 stars)

The second book was very good, thrilling space adventure with different and compelling characters fighting toward an objective that is not clearly revealed until the story progresses. Greatly enjoyed this installment and it redeemed the series for me. (4 stars)

The third book was fairly typical SM fare again, but without the head scratching - is this even canon? moments of the first. A decent read. (3 stars)

I will probably pick up #s 4 and 5 shortly to continue this series.

Sixth says

Worst Author of the black liberay strikes back again, bringing pages after pages of boring garbage.

Unless you like story written like:

And then he shot, and then he kill, and then a slip, and then he fall, and then he stand up again...

You should avoid this book or just burn it...

Selim Tlili says

The soul drinkers are an interesting chapter that has been exploring a "middle ground" between obedience to the empire and being completely free.

It's really interesting to see the ways in which every faction is "wrong"; the empire with it's crushing of free will. Chaos with their machinations and destruction and the soul drinkers... Who do terrible things and justify it by their desire to do good in the name of the emperors ideals.

In some ways it is difficult to comprehend the mind of a space marine but the author does do a good job of showing the "otherness" of the SM mind. Overall a very enjoyable read with a lot of memorable character imagery; savage Tellos with chain blades where hands should be, Sarpedon, the half spider and leader of the soul drinkers... Exceedingly interesting heroes and very interesting villains like Abraxes, Kharedon and the inquisition.

Overall very enjoyable. Not the most amazing of the warhammer novels but exceedingly enjoyable.

Chaplain Eik says

Still currently reading this book (on the first one of the collection) via my Kindle. I'm loving this representation of the Soul Drinkers, who are by far my favourite renegade chapters. Largely on the fact that unlike most deviant beliefs of the renegades, they aren't actually wrong in their beliefs! This is represented well by Ben Counter, with the added bonus of actually making it seem like its an odd way to think.

The book seems to flow very well, with plenty of action, some Witchcraft, and an introduction to a unique psychic power possessed by Sarpedon, 'The Hell'.

All in all, I'm loving it so far.

Pauli says

A great book, full of action, betrayal and deceit. The story is really fast-paced and full of mystery that i couldn't wait to read what would happen to the Soul Drinkers.

The story starts when the Adeptus Mechanicus steal a sacred artifact of the Souldrinkers: the Soul Spear which was lost for centuries till it was found by a collector running a prison occupied by mutants.

Newton says

A Space Marine is the greatest warrior ever created, standing seven feet tall, implanted with organs and bionics to enhance their strength and senses, and equipped with the best technology the Imperium has to offer. Their power armour can withstand multiple gun shells and they can continue fighting even after they suffer a great wound and can survive a shot that would normally kill a normal human. They are bound to the Emperor's will and will die for the Emperor.

The Soul Drinkers are looking for an ancient relic of the past that was lost, and they believe they found it. The Soulspear, a weapon powerful enough to destroy cities. The leader of the force is a Librarian, or a Space Marine that also has the mental qualities required to be a psyker, named Sarpedon. Once they get their prize however, it is stolen by the Adeptus Mechanicus, the people who make the weapons and armour for the Imperium. Faced with the choice of betraying the Imperium they once served or losing their honor and having one of their best commanders killed, Sarpedon decides to attack the Mechanicus in an attempt to retrieve the Soulspear. The attack fails and they are declared Excommunicate Traitoris, or traitors to the Imperium, the lowest status in the universe. When Sarpedon returns to the main ship of the Chapter, he is confronted by the Chapter Master and they begin a duel to the death to decide the fate of the Chapter, as the Inquisition (the "police" of the Imperium) want Sarpedon's dead body. Sarpedon defeats the Chapter Master and becomes the new commander of the Chapter. He then leads the Soul Drinkers into a journey filled with betrayal, action, and the ever-present Chaos forces.

Christian says

The first book in this three book omnibus was great at establishing the premise of an emancipated Space marine Chapter. The second book was very anticlimactic and the third was pretty much all action with a very flimsy plot. The storytelling is very uneven and the characterization is shallow. Truthfully, it's kinda flat. Ben Counter seems to write better Imperial Guard characters than Space Marines. Hope it picks up.

Krissy Pilkington says

It read more like fan-fiction. characters very one dimensional with zero real character development and zero convincing motivations.

"Oh! We were tricked by Tzeentch!!". Nope, sorry, that doesn't quite wash it with me. If I suspend my disbelief i can get behind thier motivation for going renegade (though it does seem an extreme reaction), but a formerly -and apparently STILL- loyal chapter of Astartes wholesale just embracing mutations and stuff? With all their decades of training to destroy heretics, xenos etc? Really??

"Brother 'whatever' has just grown a whole load of extra eyes on his face and our chapter master has turned into a giant spider.... yup, defo the blessings of out beloved God Emperor! Burn the heretics!"

Nope. Just nope. Ok book to fill a few hours reading, but essentially a pulpy written mess that leaves you scratching your head if you have a decent knowledge of 40k fluff and lore.

Just a disappointment really. Find it hard to believe the same guy wrote the brilliant Grey Knights books =/

Jake Marshall says

One of my favorite 40k novels. It has the usual fast paced blood and guts action that makes me love these books. I couldnt put it down once I started. What makes this one stand out to me is the premise. I love the way the chapter progresses and where they go once they have faced the truth.
