



A Call to Duty

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Growing up, Travis Uriah Long yearned for order and discipline in his life... the two things his neglectful mother couldn't or wouldn't provide. So when Travis enlisted in the Royal Manticoran Navy, he thought he'd finally found the structure he'd always wanted so desperately.

But life in the RMN isn't exactly what he expected. Boot camp is rough and frustrating; his first ship assignment lax and disorderly; and with the Star Kingdom of Manticore still recovering from a devastating plague, the Navy is possibly on the edge of extinction.

The Star Kingdom is a minor nation among the worlds of the Diaspora, its closest neighbors weeks or months away, with little in the way of resources. With only modest interstellar trade, no foreign contacts to speak of, a plague-ravaged economy to rebuild, and no enemies looming at the hyper limit, there are factions in Parliament who want nothing more than to scrap the Navy and shift its resources and manpower elsewhere.

But those factions are mistaken. The universe is not a safe place.

Travis Long is about to find that out.

A Call to Duty Details

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From Reader Review A Call to Duty for online ebook

Ron says

A first glance this book, and the whole Honorverse: Manticore Ascendent series, looks like a cynical attempt to milk more cash out of the David Weber's space opera stables. But A Call to Duty rises above its antecedents to bring the science fiction reader close to a hard science fiction tale of coming of age in the (then) galactic backwater of Manticore.

One can only assume that credit to the transformation goes to Timothy Zahn, creator of some of the best-loved characters in the Star Wars Extended Universe (Grand Admiral Thrawn and Mara Jade). Zahn believable, fully-realized characters the reasonable approach to the science of science fiction sets him apart from his contemporaries.

While Travis Long is just a bit too prescient for comfort, his leaps of logic save the day more than once. Nice to see the Star Kingdom having to live by its wits.

A good read.

Carl Bussema says

3.5 stars. This was close to earning 4 stars, but the beginning is very slow, and for a first novel in a new series, that's almost unforgivable, as you could lose readers forever that way. I do recommend you stick with it, because it does get good.

Most of the book (once you get into it) follows new RMN recruit Travis Long, from his boot camp days to Spacer Third Class to points beyond. Spacer Long has a nasty habit of being an absolute stickler for every rule and regulation, and we get to see him come face to face with the navy's reality not always working according to the rules. This is generally well done; I think they might have been able to cut one or two scenes about how he had to cope with broken rules, but it wasn't the sole plot element thankfully.

As a huge Honorverse fan, this trip way back in time was very interesting; when battles could be decided by a single missile (well, more accurate to say when battles involved sides possibly firing one or two missiles each, instead of the modern standard), when the political regime was worse than even what Honor faced circa books 8 to 10 (going by memory here and trying not to spoil mainline Honor), when Manticore and Haven were friends, and when nobody had yet discovered the all-important Manticore Wormhole Nexus!

I have hopes for this series; I expect that the next book at least would continue to follow Long, but there's a bit of a teaser in the final chapter, so it's hard to say where all this is going. The next book just needs to tighten up the start to get to the main plot a little faster, and it should be excellent.

Prior knowledge with Honorverse required? A familiarity with basic concepts like hyperspace, impeller wedges & nodes, fusion bottles; the relative size/function of different classes of ships like destroyers/cruisers; but no specific names of people or places are needed, due to the radically different era.

John Purvis says

“A Call to Duty” was published in 2014 and was written by David Weber (<http://www.davidweber.net>) and Timothy Zahn (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy_Zahn). This is the first book in the “Manticore Ascendant” series, which is a prequel to the “Honor Harrington” books. Mr. Weber has written more than 45 books and Mr. Zahn 25 books.

I obtained a galley of this novel for review through <https://www.netgalley.com>. This is a Science Fiction novel set in the far future. I would categorize this novel as ‘PG’ as there is some Mature Language. The novel is written in the third person, with the primary characters being Travis Long and his half brother Baron Gavin Winterfall.

Baron Winterfall is a young Lord, of very little importance. But then he is approached by some of the powerful members in Parliament to join them as they attempt to shut down, or at least significantly reduce the Royal Manticoran Navy. In part, Baron Winterfall was chosen because his half brother Travis has just joined the Navy.

Travis is drifting and is not sure where he wants to go. He wanders into a RMN recruiting station, which saves him from getting arrested when his ‘friends’ attempt to rob a jewelry store. Travis is a stickler for the rules, which causes him to rub many the wrong way. He does have a knack for thinking outside the box, which gets him noticed. Unfortunately, not all appreciate him for it.

I have been a reader of Davie Weber since 2011. After hearing Leo Laporte and Steve Gibson talk about the Honor Harrington series on the Security Now podcast (<http://twit.tv/sn>) I finally tried it. I have been hooked on the “Honorverse” and David weber ever since. This series is set many years prior to the time of Honor Harrington. The Royal Manticoran Navy is in shambles. This story begins the very long process of turning the Navy around. I thoroughly enjoyed the 11.5 hours I spent reading the novel. I give this novel a 4.5 (rounded up to 5) out of 5.

Further book reviews I have written can be accessed at <http://johnpurvis.wordpress.com/blog/>.

Liviu says

an easy pass the time early Honorverse series beginning, nothing special and a bit pointless imho - if DW is determined to mine the universe to the full possible extent, I believe there were other more interesting periods to do a series about - but reasonably entertaining to read the next installment, though if there were none, I wouldn't mind either

Jon says

3.5 to 4 stars

A new series in the Honorverse, slated to be released next week. We find ourselves back before Manticore knew it had a major wormhole, back before it had any spaceship building industry and soon after a Plague that wiped out much of its nascent population. One of our protagonists is Travis Long, who enlists in the RMN (Royal Manticore Navy) while his supposed friends rob a neighboring jewelry store. Travis acquires a couple of monickers during basic training that reflect upon his always by the book philosophy with respect to rules and regulations. The political climate on Manticore has a faction of the civilian government clamoring to dismantle the Navy and/or replace it with a Coast Guard like service that patrols the local system and protects merchants and miners from pirates. The action ramps up when Manticore sends representatives to a Haven sponsored military surplus spaceship sale. Pirates (or what we are led to believe are pirates initially) masquerading as legitimate buyers attempt a heist of their own on a much grander scale than Travis' juvenile delinquent buddies.

I flew through this plot driven action-adventure space opera in just a couple of days. I suspect the addition of Timothy Zahn helped keep the story zipping along so that David Weber didn't pause to infodump as he is wont to do. While I like Travis, and Metzger and Donnelly, the book still lacked great character development. Very good plot, but just good character writing. The Massingills came close, but their screen time was too limited for me to really form the bond they deserved.

My thanks to NetGalley for allowing me to read this eARC ebook prior to its release by Baen on October 7, 2014.

Courtney says

One question: Why haven't Weber and Zahn done a book before this?!? A Call to Duty combines Zahn's exceptional high quality character development with Weber's hard-core science fiction. I've enjoyed Weber's previous Honorverse books, but sometimes felt they lacked character depth. Now, with Zahn on board, the Honorverse rocks!

A Call to Duty is a masterful combination of plot, characters, and imagery. I cannot wait for the next installment from Weber and Zahn.

Beth says

I like this deeply researched imaginary history. I enjoy the main character, Trevor, with his rule-sticking ways and his imaginative approach to problems. The other viewpoints weren't as engrossing -- the political shenanigans and the dastardly villains, but it's worth it to keep up with the adventure.

Jack +Books & Bourbon+ says

Ahhhh...now THAT'S just what I needed. After finishing *Unbreakable* by W.C. Bauers, which was most definitely an Honorverse clone, I decided to return to the man who essentially started this type of space opera...Mr. David Weber himself. And I figured, if he is teaming up with Timothy Zahn (another of my favorite science fiction authors), the the results just have to be good, right?

Of course right! I'm honestly surprised these two sci-fi powerhouses haven't teamed up before. Timothy Zahn helps reign in David Weber's tendency to get uber verbose, resulting in an Honorverse tale that is lean, mean, and highly entertaining. Both authors have always had the details down, and are masters at building tension and giving us a solid group of characters to care about. With *A Call to Duty*, the duo have given us something special; a view of the early days of the Star Kingdom of Manticore, through the eyes of an "everyman" protagonist, in a prequel series that I didn't even realize I wanted (until I started reading it, naturally).

Strip away everything you think you know about Manticore. Here we have a fledgling Star Kingdom, poor and isolated, barely even a blip on the radar of the Republic of Haven. Bereft of ships, naval personnel, and manufacturing capability, here are the Manties as we've never seen them. No wormhole junctions, no vast merchant marine, no superior technology to speak of.

Into this ill-equipped Navy comes our main POV character and "everyman" protagonist Travis Long. In a deviation from the Weber norm, Travis is not a starship Captain, a Marine in battle armor, or a bodyguard to a military celebrity. He also doesn't have a treecat! Instead, Travis is simply a lowly Navy systems tech who is in the right places at the right times, usually with some good ideas on how to get out of trouble, and a fair amount of motivation to boot. Honestly, this was a refreshing return to what made the early Honorverse novels so fun. A relatable, normal character who isn't feared and/or respected by the universe at large. Travis is our window into this world, and though his rule-following can get a LITTLE annoying at times, he's a pretty solid character to serve as our surrogate. He has a tenacity that is admirable, even if he is a little naive at times. In typical Weber/Zahn fashion, there are plenty of supporting characters to help flesh out the tale, and they range from interesting to unnecessary. Still, it's a well rounded cast that we follow, which helps to broaden the story's reach.

Do I need to mention the space battles, political maneuvering, and scientific troubleshooting? These are all staples of Weber and Zahn's stories, and are in full swing here. Both of these authors are so good at giving our heroes (and villains) difficult technical problems to solve, and then coming up with fun and interesting ways to solve them. Other authors might fumble this part, making these passages tedious or boring. But not here. Every aspect of the story is handled well, so the technical portions are just as easy to read through as the conflict and adventure segments.

Honestly, I'm actually more excited for the sequel to this novel than I am for the next Honor Harrington-based novel. Everything is new, the fluff is essentially gone, and we get to witness the Star Kingdom really come into its own. We also get brand new characters to root for! Keep up the good work guys! Sign me up for the next novel!

Clyde says

This book is placed several hundred years before the Honor Harrington series. At that time Manticore was just a little backwater kingdom of little interest. The story starts a little slowly -- understandable as the writers have to introduce the characters and build the economic, political, and social situation of the time. However, it really gets going in the second half and provides a strong action finish (as we would expect from David Weber and Timothy Zahn).

Pretty good space opera with a strong military thread.

Carolyn says

3.5-4 stars

I enjoyed this opener in a new series, looking forward to watching the history of the Star Kingdom unfold. This is the start of a prequel series set in the Honorverse.

Betsy says

[November 7, 2014]

This book reminded me very much of Quarter Share by Nathan Lowell. They were both about a naive young man who joins the crew of a space ship with no experience and who quickly learns a lot about himself and his capabilities. Of course, Travis joins a war ship while Ishmail joins a trader, so the level of danger is very different. And their personalities are not very similar. But the general thrust of the plots seemed similar.

That's not necessarily a bad thing. I enjoyed both books and will likely read this one again, as I have Quarter Share.

I'm particularly glad to have a new Honorverse series starting.

[July 15, 2018]

I'm changing my rating after this second reading to three stars rather than four. I still enjoyed it, but it did seem to drag in places. They often describe events in such excruciating detail that I thought the plot would never advance. This is space opera. Things are supposed to happen pretty fast and exciting.

Joe Santoro says

I really loved the first, oh, 6 or 7 Honor Harrington books. It was like a great Naval novel, but in space, with some great characters. As many epic series do, it got too big for its own good, and too focused on side plots, until the main character was barely able to be found in the last book or two I read.

This is a prequel series, but a distant prequel... like The Scott Bakula Star Trek series. It shows us the beginnings of the Manticore Star Empire, and the Royal Manitoran Navy... which is really to be disbanded by politicians.

As with the Honor Harrington books, the ship stuff is great, and the political stuff is slow and predictable... luckily the book is pretty short on politics. It could definitely be a 4 or even a 5 star book if the main character wasn't so darn unlikeable. I appreciate the attempt at having an annoying, rule following, snitchy main character, but there's a reason such characters are usually not the main focus of a book.

One thing that did annoy me, (and this has nothing to do with the story) is that it's been long enough since I read the main books that I felt like there were a few shout outs that I missed, but nothing that effected the story... they did do a good job making it pretty accessible to someone new to the Honorverse.

Kathy Davie says

First in the Manticore Ascendant series in the overall Honorverse and revolving around a poor, isolated Manticore. It's the year of 1529 PD and well before Honor's time period.

MY TAKE

The "4" is more for my enjoying the back history, as it took some 230 pages before we FINALLY got into some action. It was "weird" getting that perspective on Manticore and Haven being friends and allies, and it simply feels too odd. The Republic of Haven is rich, powerful, and generous to its friends and allies. And it's terrifying to think of where it will descend. You can't help but feel for what is ahead for its people. The horrors. Meanwhile, Manticore is the poor cousin and with almost no influence in their universe.

That said, I do wish that Weber & company had provided more of a sense of when this took place within Manticore history. I know it's before events in *House of Steel: The Honorverse Companion*. And I suspect you should put off reading *House of Steel* before you read this; it'll help keep your sense of time from skewing too badly. If you've already read it, no biggie. Ooh, and the Andermani Empire is not yet, for Anderman is just beginning to build it.

Oh, it gets your heart rate up, mostly because (if you've read any of the Honor Harrington stories) you get so angry with shortsighted politicians more interested in feathering their own nest than in protecting their planet or their people. Nothing ever changes, does it? Then there's the slack discipline at the training school. Cheating? Who cares. Nobody really knows anything because of the cheating? Who cares.

That perfect proving ground for the Chancellor's big plan for his own aggrandizement that results in the *Phobos* disaster and then events onboard the *Vanguard* simply prove that Travis' concerns are legitimate.

It's a rough period for Manticore. They aren't building any ships, in fact the Royal Manticoran fleet is being dismantled! Their king is heading toward the end of his kingship, although he has planned, quite brilliantly it seems, to give his son a chance to bring their navy back to life. One of a number of small hooks to encourage us to pick up the next in the series.

There is a bigger hook at the end of the story: the discovery of the wormhole that will change everything for Manticore, except it looks as if someone else will benefit from it! I can't wait to see how Manticore will lay its claim!

Most of *A Call to Duty* is laying the background for this new sub series, introducing us to the very few officers who will help project Manticore into the future that lies ahead of it. One important sub theme is the cheating, the lack of discipline, the lack of caring with Travis as the counterpoint who does care. It's through Travis that the story is told, a spacer who believes it's important to really know how things work. It's lucky for Travis when he gets assigned to HMS *Guardian* where the difference between how Davison runs his ship and how Eigen runs *Guardian* is like night and day. It's a belief, a way of doing, that is carried through in the Honor Harrington series. Knowing that eventually Travis' beliefs will come true and be enforced is encouraging as you read through this muck of lazy sods. It all makes you appreciate Honor's way of doing business.

I do feel for Travis. That mother of his...she shouldn't have bred herself, that's for sure. Although I'm sure the Kingdom of Manticore is quite grateful she did! We can also be grateful for Lieutenant Blackstone! She had some good questions for Travis, and she's a stand-up officer.

When it comes down to the excitement of the story finally beginning...whoa. Guzarwan plays it well. He's got almost all the eventualities figured out, except he doesn't expect competent officers or dedicated men. Heart-stopping moments here! It's possible that this is where the seeds of discontent are sown, waiting for bad guys to fan it into a bonfire.

THE STORY

It's a scattered trail of Travis Long's reports of negligence and cheating that ends with him aboard the *Guardian* and the battle of his life. It's a battle that will do him well in the eyes of those who truly count.

THE CHARACTERS

Travis Uriah "Rule-Stickler" Long is a one of those rule-abiding types who doesn't get along socially with anyone. Even his mother, **Melisande Vellacott Long**, ignores him. Well, she has her own issues and prefers breeding her dogs to remembering she even has a family. Gavin Vellacott, **Second Baron Winterfall**, is Travis' older half-brother.

Manticore

Casey-Rosewood Instructional Center is...

...the RMN's training base for enlisted and non-commissioned officers: boot camp to training school.

Gunner's Mate First Class Johnny Funk is Travis' platoon commander. His boot camp mates include **Charlie "Chomps" Townsend** is from Sphinx and has the appetite to prove it; **Elaine "Whistler" Dunharrow**; **"Shofar" Liebowitz**; **"Professor" Cyrene**; and, **"Betcha" Johnson**.

Lieutenant William Cyrus is the Impeller Tech Division's senior officer to whom Travis reports the cheating. Again and again. He's not the only instructor tired of Long's being a stickler for the rules or practicality. There's also **Stockmann**. **Senior Chief Dierken (Eleanor** is his wife) and Funk try to save Travis.

Fire Control Specialist First Class Matayoshi and his assistant is **Fire Control Tech Third Class Lorelei Osterman** are leery about an outsider in their fire control class. Students in the class include **Smith**, **Kelderman**, and **Townsend**. **Lieutenant Krauss** teaches gravitics.

Colonel Jean Massingill is the CO at Casey-Rosewood, and she's hating it more and more. **Alvis "Gill" Massingill** is her husband and a very capable engineer with extensive engineering and yard-dog experience; and, both are retirees from the Solarian League. Manticore had promised great things if the Massingills would come to the Star Kingdom and train the Royal Marines and work on ambitious projects. Those promises aren't coming through.

Captain Alexander Caldecott is an idiot, to use Massingill's words, a "staff weenie". He has no experience, but because of his "exalted" family, he thinks he knows it all.

Travis' small circle of friends in high school

Bassit Corcoran leads the group that includes **Pinker**, **Jammy**, and Travis.

The Royal Manticoran Navy

Captain Horace "Race" Kiselev has been keeping watch over the mothballed fleet that includes the HMS *Mars*, and is being named to be Casey-Rosewood's new commanding officer *and* promoted to commodore. **Juliana** is his wife. **Admiral Carlton Locatelli** is the commanding officer of the Star Kingdom's System Command. **First Lord of the Admiralty Admiral Thomas P. Caznestro**. **Lieutenant Anne Blackstone** was the Royal Manticoran Navy recruiter that night.

HMS Vanguard is...

...where Travis will be assigned under the command of **Captain Robert Davison**, a waste of space. There's no good hoping that **Spacer Second Class Tully Atherton's** experience will slow Travis down. **Master Chief Dovnar** is the bosun. **Commander Bertinelli** is ticked off with Travis' saving Esterle. **Spacer Second Class Suzanne Marx** is in Communications. **Lieutenant Lisa Donnelly** is the officer who listens to Travis. **Grillo. Lieutenant Commander Allegra Metzger. Lieutenant Elmajian** is the assistant tactical officer.

Chief Gravitics Tech Randall Craddock is Travis' new boss. **Senior Chief Gravitics Specializ Inzinga. Spacers First Class Bonnie Esterle and Amber Bowen** are also in gravitics as are **Yarrow, Benson, and Kilgore.**

HMS Phobos, her sister ship is the Deimos, and both...

...were made from the *Mars*. **Commander Sophia Ouvrard** is in charge; her XO is **Lieutenant Commander Armand Creutz. Dinks.**

HMS Diactoros and her escort Perseus are...

...one of the Navy's fast courier ships and her escort, respectively, and the king has sneakily dispatched them to offer passage to interested governments in Ueshiba and Minorca and then on to the Secours sale in Haven.

HMS Casey is a...

...light cruiser that will be quickly refurbished to use as advertising for the shipyard Prince Edward wants to start up. She'll then be sent to the Secours sale.

HMS Guardian is...

...going to the Secours sale with Commodore Kiselev in overall command of the mission and leaving **Captain Eigen** in command of the ship. Kiselev takes on Metzger as XO; Massingill will be onboard as the Marine commander with **Sergeants Holderlin and Pohjola**; Gill will come aboard as well; Donnelly and Long are assigned too; **Lieutenant Ioanna Kountouriote** is in gravitics. **Aflonze Joyce** is on com. **Ensign Joji Yanagi. Commander Calkin** keeps a wish-list of missiles. **Gravitics Specialist First Class Jan Vyland** is considered a cold fish. **Com Specialist Second Class Patty Boysenko** is cool with helping out with communications or with her sharpshooting skills; **Lieutenant Grace Burns**, Officer of the Watch — and daughter of Baron White Springs, I'll have you know — is not. It doesn't help that she's letting personal animosity get in the way of making that call. **Carlyle.**

The government of Manticore

King Michael is nearing the end of his kingship, and he's most grateful for that. **Mary** is his second wife. His son, **Commander Prince Edward Winton**, will succeed him. **Cynthia** is Edward's wife. Prime Minister Davis Harper, **Duke Burgundy**, is a perpetual conciliator, a long-term plan between himself and the king.

First Lord of Law Deborah Scannabecchi, Duchess New Bern, doesn't seem to belong to any particular party. Clara Sumner, **Countess Calvingdell**, sits on the Appropriations Committee and has faith in Winterfall. **Earl Broken Cliff** is the Secretary of Education also has faith in him.

Pro-Navy Party

Seems that Burgundy has been biding his time until Edward can come on board and they can revamp the Navy. James Mantegna, **Earl Dapplelake**, is the Defense Minister and has authority over the Royal Manticoran Navy.

Anti-Navy Party is...

...more interested in promoting their personal interests and power in the **MPARS** (Manticoran Patrol & Rescue Service; pronounced Em-Pars) fleet which patrols the spacelanes around the twin suns of the Manticore System.

Earl Breakwater is the Chancellor of the Exchequer. **Baroness Castle Rock**, **Earl Chillon**, and **Baroness Tweenriver** are some of his allies.

Martin Ashkenazy designs mining ships and has a "brilliant" plan to tear battlecruisers apart and make baby ships.

The pirates and the Fenris, a.k.a., the Wanderer

I'm a little confused in this. I think the ambitious **Captain Wolfe "Moss" Guzarwan** is "leading" the fake delegation from Ueshiba while **Captain Oberon Jalla** claims to be part of the Concordia Shipping Company of Third Brunswick. **Dhotrumi** is Guzarwan's computer geek. **Vacahli** is in command of the boarding parties. **Shora**; **Mota**; and **Labroo**, his second-in-command, are part of the plan. Seems **Canaan** is Guzarwan's client.

The Secours sale at Marienbad in Haven

Haven ship RHNS Saintonge is hosting...

...the Secours sale. **Commodore Jason Flanders** commands the *Saintonge*. **Ambassador Boulanger** is the head of the Havenite delegation. **Lieutenant Riley** pilots a shuttle. **Crevillan** is the shuttle's coxswain; **Prevost** is the co-pilot.

General Chu is in command of the land forces on Marienbad.

Other systems interested in the sale include...

...**Micah**, **Zuckerman**, the ravaged **Ramon**, **Suchien**, **Yalta**, and **Casca**.

Captain Gordon Henderson is with the Cascan Defense Force and brings their pirate problem to everyone's attention. He is also the new commander of the former RHNS *Péridot*. **Kanth Padua** is the chief Yaltan delegate. **Petrov Nahnawa** is Ramon's chief delegate.

Beowulf

Axelrod of Terra is...

...a star-spanning megacorporation. **Karen Wamocho** is a manager. **Luther Luangprasaut** is an analyst working under Wamocho who believes he's found a new wormhole near Manticore. **Carnahiba** and **Oehm** are other analysts.

The mining ship

Rafe Hanford is an asteroid miner and now commands his own small ship, the *Rafe's Scavenger*. **Katerina Shankweiler** seems to be his engineer. **Gratz** is the pilot. **Pickering**, **Chou**, and **Juarez** are part of the crew.

Gustav Anderman is a mercenary. **Acton** and **Samuel Tilliotson** each own a single-ship freight company in Manticore. **Countess Acton** has built one merchantman and wants to build two more.

Genies are humans who have been genetically altered to better survive particular planets. The **Brotherhood** sounds as if they were a very, very powerful group of pirates who were able to terrify whole planets.

THE COVER & THE TITLE

It's a Baen cover with its cartoonish graphics. The background is a black space with the *Saintonge* filling

most of it as that shuttle is about to blow up on top of it, and a spacesuited Massingill is blasting out into space away from the eruption to come.

The title is all about Travis, it's *A Call to Duty* for him and others like him.

Yzabel Ginsberg says

(I got an ARC courtesy of NetGalley, in exchange for an honest review.)

Let's not dwell for too long on the cover, which is definitely a reminder of older SF books design, but didn't do much for me. (To be fair, I got my share of gorgeous covers hiding stupid novels, though. So I assumed that the contrary might be true as well.)

I must also say that I never read any of the Honor Harrington novels; as a result, I can't say if it's true to the Honorverse or not, and can't compare it to other similar works by those authors. I went into this one not even knowing what I was going into, except that "it seems to be military sci-fi, and I kind of feel like reading this genre at the moment." Especially since the blurb depicted a somewhat decadent Navy, and that such settings are always ripe for a lot of themes I tend to appreciate.

Travis Long is a young man, even a teenager, whose family doesn't pay much attention to: his half-brother Gavin is a Lord, and his mother is busy with her work. On a whim, he decides to join the Royal Manticoran Navy, both craving for a discipline he was never subjected to and for a place to be after a stunt that almost went wrong for him. To be honest, I'm still not sure about his motivations: I would've liked to see his family problems depicted a little more deeply, perhaps, or to be given more details, because as it is, it seemed just a little "woe is me". Fortunately, this doesn't last for long, and Travis doesn't dwell on it for the whole novel; we only get a little reminder a couple of times. The character tends to be a rule-stickler, which fits as an echo of what he craved. On the other hand, it holds good potential for inner conflict: he sticks to rules, but has a natural tendency to think outside the box, and while the latter helps in tense situations, at some point, I can envision both aspects of his personality getting pitched against each other. Although Travis isn't a terribly likeable young man in the beginning, there's definitely room for development here. He didn't strike me as a character who would forever remain the same.

The novel focuses on two major themes: Travis's life in the Navy (as well as the problems that it has to face later—not going to spoil), and the game of politics that runs behind the scenes. The Manticore system is an interesting enough setting: a kingdom actually born from what used to be a corporation, Manticore Ltd. (I have no idea how the Board ever came to decide going monarchical was a good idea, but why not. This is also one of those aspects I would've want to learn more about. However, as I said, I don't know the Honorverse, and perhaps this is explained in another book. I still wish there had been more of an explanation here, for readers like me.) In a way, it reminded me a little of parliamentary monarchies like the UK's, with a king—and even a former ruler named "Queen Elizabeth"—who holds decisional power... but not so much that he can afford to disregard Parliament's pressures.

In the novel, the political intrigue runs mostly around the conundrum of "what to do with a Navy that has never known a war, and whose last round of battles was against some pirates, one century ago?" Gavin Winterfall, Travis's half-brother, plays a minor role in this, but one that might expand in the next novel, perhaps, because he turned out to be more intrigue-savvy than his own allies thought at first. As for the RMN itself, its own people sometimes question their place, wondering if what they do is so useful, and if they'll be

ready the day a real war looms.

The story itself was quite entertaining, though a little heavy-handed on technical and military terms; I could adapt to those, and I enjoyed the atmosphere they created, but they might be a problem for readers who're not keen on them. The dialogues made me feel like I was really on a spaceship, with operations going on following a given protocol. I also enjoyed how Travis manages to play an important part, thanks to his ideas, yet isn't the one who completely saves the day all the time (he's only enlisted, not a captain or another officer, and his being THE saviour who does everything wouldn't have fit in my opinion). Even the way he gets rewarded reflects how Navy personnel has to traipse around potential political mishaps.

I'm not exactly fond of the ending, though. It seemed kind of... predictable to me.

The novel has its flaws, and I wouldn't consider it as excellent, but as a beginning to a series, I think it sets the stage for a lot of potentially interesting developments, and I certainly wouldn't mind reading the next installment. 3.5 stars.

John Patterson says

In A Call to Duty two of the greatest sci-fi authors combine to offer one of the most exceptional novels in the Honorverse series. It tells the story of the beginnings of the Royal Manticoran Navy, following the early career of Travis Long as he survives boot camp, gets his first assignment as Spacer Third Class and works his way up to Petty Officer. There is no real main plot here as the novel reads more as three separate novellas each with their own plot smushed into a single novel.

I would recommend this book any Honorverse fan and even those who are new to the Honorverse. The technobabble that David Weber fans know and love meshes really well with Timothy Zahn's exceptional character development and storytelling.
