



Heirs of the Blade

Adrian Tchaikovsky

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She remembered how it felt to lose Salma, first to the wiles of the Butterfly-kind girl, then to hear the news of his death, abandoned and alone in the midst of the enemy. She remembered how it felt to see her father hacked to death before her eyes. But of her murder of Achaeos, of the bite of her blade into his unsuspecting flesh, the wound that had sapped him and ruined him until he died, she remembered nothing, felt nothing. In such a vacuum, how could she possibly atone? Tynisa is running, but she cannot escape the demons of her own mind. Amidst the fragmenting provinces of the Dragonfly Commonwealth her past will at last catch up with her. Her father's ghost is hunting her down. At the same time, the Wasp Empress, Seda, is on the move, her eyes on the city of Khanaphes, the fallen jewel of the ancient world. Whilst her soldiers seek only conquest, she sees herself as the heir to all the old powers of history, and has her eyes on a far greater prize.

Heirs of the Blade Details

Date : Published 2012 (first published October 1st 2011)

ISBN :

Author : Adrian Tchaikovsky

Format : Paperback 622 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Epic Fantasy, Fiction, Science Fiction, Steampunk

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From Reader Review Heirs of the Blade for online ebook

Katy says

I actually enjoyed this installment of the series a bit more than the last few. Missing are the long and endless major battle scenes (still plenty of fighting action though). I just don't love the big battle scenes. Che becomes a bit more likable for me and this book has much more of Tynsia -- one of my favorite characters.

Raunak Milton says

Tynisa is haunted by the crimes she things she has committed. From inflicting a mortal wound to her sister to losing her true love to the war, all she could do is to run away from her home, lest the wreckage of her past drives her mad. In this read which culminates in a brilliant duel, we dive into the depths of her character and how she gets absolved of her wrongs and forgives herself. Though she gets a cruel punishment for the madness that consumes her during most of the book, it fits in together perfectly and provides the reader a very grim satisfaction towards the end. Its a nice break from the artifice centered narrative to the days of lore style of writing.

Josh says

Forged with the blood of many a Kinden, the seventh instalment of the Shadows of the Apt series is a tale of love and retribution wielded by deaths mistress and rippled across the vast land of the Commonweal and surrounding environs. The true sequel to both 'The Scarab Path' and 'Salute the Dark', 'Heirs of the Blade' mystifies foremost with magic courtesy of the omnipresent Darakyon, and the ageing masters of Khanaphes. The unseen dimension this direction added to core characters in Tynisa, Che, and Seda establishes a sound platform of which to springboard further allure and relevance to the inapt methodology. I particularly liked the necromancer angle in which death simply signifies another means by which warriors can influence parties and destroy the living.

Echoes of the Twelve Year War resonate louder than the beat of a war drum throughout the Dragonfly Kinden's open apprehension when interacting with a servant or perceived servant of The Empire. The Wasps themselves assume almost a mythical form of legend in the Commonweal and are treaded with equal parts apprehension and admiration. While this latest instalment focuses on the relatively uncharted Commonweal – one can't help but draw comparisons to the Dragonfly notabilities rule to that of the Empire – the monarchy a core element to the plot to provide context to the lives and rule of the Dragonfly Kinden.

In 'Heirs of the Blade', we also gain further insight into the lore of the infamous weapon master through their tradition, etiquette and mutual respect of the 'dance of death'. Tynisa, the face of modern day one person army undertakes a journey of self discovery leaving a trail of blood in her wake while invoking wasp Kinden like tendencies along the way (Re: Gaved). Painting Tynisa in such a light further defines her depth but also showcases a more human aspect to the accomplished yet self-banished warrior.

Despite the 5 stars I give this book, there were momentary lapses in action and seemingly irrelevant interactions which did little to maintain the flow of the series, however, these few and far between enough to

be excused. Overall a solid addition to the series which sets up the next instalment and further expands on the rein of terror sure to be imposed by the Wasp Kinden Empress and her followers. Highly recommend!

Joy says

If you've come to book 7 You don't need me to tell you how enjoyable this World is of the Apt and Inapt.

This book divulges more of what it is to be Inapt (unable to even comprehend how to use a mechanical device.) A linchpin character throughout the whole series; the young girl Che, is struggling to manage psychic powers that have turned her from being an Apt Beetle engineer to being a Inapt mystic. Her lucid dreams now link her with the Wasp Empress who has also had the same transformation but through drinking and bathing in blood.

The author makes all his characters very humanly multi-dimensional with whom you can't help but empathize no matter how bad they are. For instance; with this bloody handed Empress... Her brother, the Emperor, murder the whole family to gain his throne, leaving only her as a young child to mentally torture her with the same possible death. Powerless, she grabbed the opportunity to gain the powers blood magic gave her to do away with her horrible brother.

Che; on the on the other hand, manages to retain an innocence and kind heart. She bumbles through many key conflicts with the ongoing Wasp takeover, yet still turning them to her side's favor. She's an unassuming character but plays a key role.

There are also many side stories with other characters, so lots of plots within plots. Its all coming to another critical war with the Empress holding dark magic. Her only opposition is gentle Che with matching magic skill.

For my own taste I enjoy an author who doesn't burden me with detailed justification of how its beings came to exist with their insect appearance and abilities or how the magic "works" with convoluted rules. Its always better to be immersed in the world and develop a feel for it as you read. There is always a new insect based race cropping up too which is interesting.

Liviu says

I have finished Heirs of the Blade (book 7 of the Apt series) and I enjoyed it a lot as expected though I am yet unsure where I would rate it - Scarab path is still my all time favorite with salute the Dark next and while recreating the dark and moody atmosphere of Scarab, Heirs is not quite there maybe because it is second after Scarab, but i think it worked better than the complete change of feel in Sea Watch which was enjoyable but "lighter" in many ways

Heirs of the Blade is a follow-up of The Scarab Path though it also references Blood of the Mantis/Salute the Dark too and has a clear "this is what's next" ending which neither Scarab nor Sea Watch had (Heirs is parallel chronologically to Sea Watch as far as I can see), so one can say that Heirs concludes the "middle part" of the 10 volume series after the first part of four volumes and with the last part of three volumes to

come in 2012 and beyond.

And the most magic so far - in that sense the book reads like a major amplification of the magic in Scarab Path; dark, moody, lots of fights and duels, new kinden too as usual

The ending was both a homage to one of the most cliched tropes of sff and a masterstroke; and it really worked well

Full FBC Rv:

INTRODUCTION: There is no secret that in the past three years the Shadows of the Apt has become one of my favorite ongoing fantasy series for its combination of superb world building, great characters and extreme inventiveness. Salute the Dark ended quite emphatically the first part of the series dealing with the war between the Collegium and the Empire in Black and Gold, while The Scarab Path, a standalone within the larger series context, has been my personal favorite to date and I rated it the best fantasy of 2010.

In The Sea Watch the author changed the feel and the focus from the heavily atmospheric and magical, to a fast adventure style with a science fictional bent and while I enjoyed it quite a lot, I missed the more "doom and gloom" darkness of the magical world.

I strongly recommend to go and get the first six books and read them before proceeding further here, though I will try to keep the spoilers to the minimum possible. Be warned that even the blurb of Heirs of the Blade consists of huge spoilers for the ending of the first part.

OVERVIEW/ANALYSIS: In talking about Heirs of the Blade, there are at least three aspects to consider. The writing style, the way the book belongs in the series as characters and feel and the way it belongs as storyline. I will just mention that the more we are advancing in the series, the better the author has been getting at writing technique and Heirs of the Blade just flows on the page.

But the real tests of the novel are in the second and third parts since it is easy for long series to get bogged down in repetition of events, sameness of "feel" and generally leave the impression that the author copied and pasted from an earlier book and just changed a little here and there.

And I am happy to say that Heirs of the Blade overall passes these tests with flying colors and I will explain why I think so. The novel focuses on Tynisa, Che, Thalric and Seda, while introducing several new characters that play important roles here, as well as bringing back some characters from earlier novels and short stories, most notably Felipe Shah, Angved, Praeda and Ammon. Geographically, most of the action takes place in the part of the Commonweal visited in earlier novels too, but there is a lot of surveying of the wreckage of the Wasp invasion in its eastern parts and we return to Khanaphes and the Nem desert too for some memorable scenes. As usually, new kinden are introduced.

As can be seen from the above, Heirs of the Blade is a direct follow-up of The Scarab Path though it also references Blood of the Mantis/Salute the Dark too and has a clear "this is what's next" ending which neither The Scarab Path nor The Sea Watch had. Chronologically Heirs of the Blade seems to be parallel to The Sea Watch, so one indeed can say that the book concludes the "middle part" of the 10 volume series after the first part of four volumes and with the last part of three volumes to come in 2012 and beyond.

Heirs of the Blade is a pure fantasy book in many ways - though there is a technological advance subplot - and it has the most magic so far, reading like a major amplification of the magic in The Scarab Path; the feel

is dark and moody and it works extremely well.

Nothing symbolizes this better than the famous prophecy line from Salute the Dark which I thought I understood at the time but it seems to be even deeper, as now someone else utters it in trance, adding more:

"Falling leaves, red and brown and black and gold." "A rain of burning machines over a city of the Apt. The darkness between trees. The Seal of the Worm is breaking."

There is a lot of action - fights and duels, intrigue and skirmishes, while the overall feel is one of darkness descending and the characters trying to keep it at bay a moment longer; another line emphasizes this:

"Let us have peace and prosperity, as much as this late age allows it."

And of course the ending is the final masterstroke of the novel, being an homage to one of the most cliched tropes of sf and which worked really well. So the stage is now set for the last part of the series and while through both volume five and six, I have wondered where the author intends to go, now there is a clear sense of the storyline. I am still wondering where the events of The Sea Watch will fit, since now that novel rather than The Scarab Path feels a little out of joint as the series goes heavily magic rather than sfnal. Very interesting times are announced for the Kinden world and I am eager to be there.

Overall, Heirs of the Blade (A++) was the Shadow of the Apt novel I have expected after the awesome The Scarab Path and it immediately jumped into my top ten novels of the year.

Neil Pearson says

With book 7 we finally catch up with the remaining "lead" character, Tynisa, who we haven't seen since the end of "salute the dark". Her story is quite a sad one and it's an interesting journey watching her make all the wrong choices and how one person's loss can have an effect on thousands. Adrian does a great job of expanding on his world with the commonweal and it's interesting to discover it's not quite as romantic a place as the dragonfly-kindens Salme Dien had us believe.

It was also good to see Thalric and Che again. Che becomes more fascinating with each appearance although I do feel that Thalric needs to get his edge back soon as he's a little too "nice" in this adventure. The most interesting characters this time around are the various wasps. Varmen is a complicated character and his loss is tragically romantic and Gaved is a "simple" opportunist. Adrian is basically showing us that the wasp-kindens can be human too and it's the empire that gives them the bad reputation.

I was slightly disappointed with the Khanaphes and Seda subplot. I initially thought they were going to be a big part of the book but they disappear completely about a third into the plot. It's all useful set-up but it does feel a bit tacked on.

I'm not sure whether book 8 will merge all the stories together again but I'm hoping they will as I think the various stories work better together than separately. It's been an interesting experiment though (The scarab path was excellent) and it's allowed Adrian to play around with some different styles/approaches. I'm eagerly awaiting the next installment.

Jasper says

Originally posted at: <http://thebookplank.blogspot.com/2013/08/heirs-of-blade.html>

Ever since starting in *Empire of Black and Gold*, the *Shadows of the Apt* series has been at the top of my list of favourite series. I read *The Sea Watch* somewhere last year but never had gotten around to continue in the series until now. And even though I have been out of the series for a year, from the first page onwards it felt like I read the first six books just the other day. This is because in the *Shadows of the Apt* series stands out in the current fantasy genre. Adrian Tchaikovsky introduces and blends a lot of unique fantasy genres that grow on you as you delve deeper into the series and that definitely leave a lasting impression on you.

The Sea Watch changed perspective and broadened the already large universe of *Shadows of the Apt* by including the sea side of it. *Heirs of the Blade* takes us back the main land and focuses on several characters that were introduced earlier in the series. *Heirs of the Blade* is divided into four parts and the first part focuses on Tynisa. The second part introduces the other storylines those of Seda the Wasp Empress, Che and Thalric as well as a few others. The third and fourth part of *Heirs of the Blade* shows the storyline alternating each other and eventually you see how interwoven the connections between the stories are.

Tynisa has always been a character that really stood out in the series. Her troubled past being a halfbreed between spider and mantis, brought up by Stenwold Maker and later finding out her heritage and becoming a Weaponsmaster. In this seventh addition to the series, Tynisa is haunted by events she witnessed in the earlier books. She travels to the Commonweal to seek guidance and finds herself confronting her own demons. Tynisa was introduced in the first book already, and all along her path in the series she has changed, grown confident. However her development takes another few leaps in the right direction in *Heirs of the Blade*. It was great to see a lot of dedication to Tynisa's role in the *Shadows of the Apt*.

Che's (Cheerwell Maker) character can probably be seen as the main protagonist of the series, she has gone through quite some ordeals herself and have all shaped her in some way or another, having lost her Aptitude she is now one of the powerful Inapt and finally able to control her ancestor art. It was great to see that the events of *The Scarab Path* were picked up In *Heirs of the Blade* further showing how Che's fate and importance for the rest of the series. In his series Adrian Tchaikovsky introduces several Kinden, that all have their own set of behaviour either being confident or quite shy and the like. Che is a beetle; careful and kind hearted by nature, and her actions in the series greatly reflects these traits, I keep rooting for her. Che's companion the ex-Rekef Thalric, this relationship doesn't feel like it's very strong yet but does seem that it is gaining strength. Thalric is a quite enigmatic character and thinks about several subject on a different level than Che and thereby making the whole quite complex. The self reflection of Thalric and "struggle" if you can call it that was shown in a neat manner. And when push comes to shove, Thalric springs into his old Wasp-y viciousness to deal with the challenge at hand.

Besides Tynisa and Che, another important character that makes an appearance in the first half of the book is the Wasp Empress, Seda. Seda has undergone the same as Che, losing her Aptitude and becoming a strong Inapt. I am really impressed by how Adrian Tchaikovsky shows her character. Her character radiates this strong air of dominance and danger. In all that Seda undertakes, she doesn't take no for an answer, even with the wrong look you'll have to watch out. Her powers are even more dangerous since she learned rituals of the Mosquito Uctebri. Likewise Che's character it was good to have Seda in the storyline as you now learn what it all is starting to mean. There were some speculation as to what it all could mean. This is later followed up by revealing how it all is connected. Even though were still in the seventh book so far with still three to go, it does make you wonder how the rest of the story will start to unfold.

I really like that Adrian Tchaikovsky took the story to the Commonweal in Heirs of the Blade, there were the occasional references in the earlier book but not one that had the focus there. Like the rest of the world that Adrian Tchaikovsky creates for us, the Commonweal is neatly detailed, lush and interesting with the different Kinden that make up their own societies there in. There is also a short detour, that is just a crucial for the storyline to the city of Khanaphes. The introduction of this ancient city really gave again the rustic feel and how powerful the masters are and above all what Seda plans to do.

In the end of the book Seda's plans of rising a new war are being envisioned but besides this part the book ends on a really cool scene, one of which I hadn't imagined. Don't know if I can call it a bold move but I am eager to see how this will work out for the remainder of the series, what Seda's plans are and how tough it for her opposition will be.

I am so glad that I finally had gotten the chance to continue in the Shadows of the Apt series, like I mentioned in the beginning, Shadows of the Apt grows and sticks on you, it feels like I have just read the other books the other day. Heirs of the Blade follows up the events of The Scarab Path. I might have been nice to see a link with The Sea Watch, but I'm not giving up just yet, guessing by Adrian Tchaikovsky's careful plotting I guess there will be some links to The Sea Watch to follow in the three remaining books. There are some great character developments and broadening of the world in Heirs of the Blade, but I also think that with the ending as it is in Heirs of the Blade, Adrian Tchaikovksy lays down the prefect foundation to take his series again that step further. Shadows of the Apt is a series that never stops to amaze me.

John Gwynne says

Another great instalment in the 'Shadows of the Apt' series. Fantastic plot developments and twists, with some seriously epic battle scenes. Don't know how Adrian Tchaikovsky keeps up this kind of momentum and quality - plot, character, action, all brilliantly balanced. Loved it.

Amelia says

[The empress Seda goes to Kanaphes to gain the ma

Alytha says

Finished volume 7 of Shadows of the Apt by Adrian Tchaikovsky; Heirs of the Blade.

(slightly spoilery!)

In terms of plot, the first part of the book follows Tynisa, who fled Collegium after Achaeos' death, and is now wandering through the Commonweal, hunting some idealistic spark of an ideal society that she caught from her friend Salma.

Later, Che and Thalric are trying to find her. And there's a violent peasant uprising that they all end up right in the middle of.

So, looking at the general summary, there's not all that much happening in terms of plot, but there's quite a lot of good character stuff. Tynisa finally gets her day in the limelight. Poor thing...child of two warring kinden, raised by a third, in a city of Apt, where, on the one hand, she is cut off from a lot of aspects of life in Collegium, being Inapt, and, double whammy, also from the Inapt magic stuff of her parent kindens. No wonder she doesn't feel she fits in. Through Salma, she gets an idea of the Commonweal being an ideal place, happy peasants governed by benevolent nobles. She decides to go there, to find Salma's family, and maybe also find a place where she belongs.

Unfortunately, she not only finds out that everything isn't quite as nice in the Commonweal, and that Salma's mother is a bitch, but she also gets caught by her father's errant ghost, who uses her crush on Salma's brother (as replacement for Salma himself) as a hook to turn her into an emotionless killing machine, and guide her towards a Mantis-typical bloody and heroic end.

Fortunately, Che and Thalric and a magician they picked up on the way arrive in time to help her cast out the ghost. Unfortunately, that's not the end of Tisamon...

I didn't really like the peasant rebels when they were introduced. Maybe they weren't really supposed to be likeable, as they're not very Robin-Hood-like, at least not in the beginning. They do become slightly more endearing though. And they do have a certain reason to be, as they've been abandoned by their nobles after the end of the war.

I quite liked the changing focus onto the Inapt kinden and their magic. I wonder how far Che will be going in that regard. I guess she'll have to face off against Seda at some point. After The Sea Watch, which was a bit of a sideline, despite being very interesting, we've moved further back into the main action now. Or rather, it's been set up to hit the fan sometime soon.

Interesting things in this one:

I bet nobody else ever noticed either that there's almost no birds in Kinden-world? The insects probably ate them in revenge when they started growing into gigantism...Tynisa clearly has never seen one before.

I see bad things coming...the Empire declares the Provinces as protectorate, is setting its sights back on Collegium, has an agreement with the Iron Glove. Oh, and rock oil. And undead Tisamon (in a bad mood). Good times are coming...

Varmen's blaze of glory... :(

We finally find out that Salma isn't actually his first name, but his family name. Barbarian lowlanders...

I really wonder how the Mantids have managed to survive as a kinden so far, seeing their overblown ideas about honour and dying in battle and things like that. Definitely the most mentally screwed-up of all kinden...or maybe Tisamon was an extreme example of the kinden.

And now, I've really caught up with the writer...I hope the next one will be out soon.

(Although, dear Mr Tchakovsky, could you please stop flogging the dead Mantis? just let him rest in whatever amount of peace he can, poor sod...)

In short, really really liked this one.

9/10

Jason says

5 Stars

The Shadows of the Apt series by Adrian Tchaikovsky is in a nutshell, the must read series for all fantasy readers. This also applies to a smaller degree to those that read science fiction and steampunk. To me this is a series that should be receiving all the notoriety, the fan fare, and the must read attention, that much lesser works receive. For me, over the last three years of my life, no books have called to me as these have. No other series has continued to push my imagination, my emotions, and my enjoyment.

Sure, Book # 4, Salute the Dark, closes many of the main storylines, plot points, war with the Empire of Black and Gold, and of course many our heroes lives, it does so by ending as the beginning to the much larger story line. Tchaikovsky has really done a fine job at blending a science fiction heavy world, with old school magic and twisted it in a steampunk fashion.

I really feel that this is an incredibly underrated series and work of fiction. In a fantasy world that is filled with cutout characters, repetitive plot lines, too many bloodsuckers, and stereotypical villains and heroes, Tchaikovsky has found a way to show true imagination, unique story lines, and unparalleled epic action. Each of his books has shown the evolution of his writing skills. Each new book has made the earlier books better, by giving them new and deeper meanings. He writes with world building in mind, and does it better than most. Everything he writes is epic, the battles, the plot lines, the weaponry, and the emotional payout. His stories are about characters. Memorable protagonists and antagonists, that comes across in three dimensional forms. You will remember them long after you finish each book. Some you will remember like old friends and others as archenemies. Over 3200 pages so far and at least 3 more books to go. Tchaikovsky has found a way to make an old genre fresh again...Long live the Kinden.

Now about my feelings for this book, #7 in the series, Heirs of the Blade. It is simply the best book of the series so far. I did not think that this would be possible, as I absolutely loved #5 The Scarab Path, and did not think that the intimacy of that book could be beat. Where that book is solely about my two favorite characters of the series, Che and Thalric, this one was about them, about Tynisa, and it tied in many of our past heroes and villains.

Like The Scarab Path this is a dark, moody, and very grey novel, and hopefully it is the true direction that the series is headed at. The new world Apt, technological driven kinden are now coming to believe and come in contact with the old world magic and mysticism Inapt. At the center of it all is Cheerwell Maker, to me the real heart of this series, the real center around all the plot lines, and the most likable among an amazing cast of characters. Her relationship with the old wasp enemy Thalric fuels much of the emotion and intensity of the series as a whole. Tchaikovsky smartly builds their relationship at an incredibly slow pace, allowing circumstances, and tribulations to slowly chip away at the walls she had up for her natural enemy. They have gone through so much together that their closed feelings for one another are nearly palpable for us the reader. A favorite moment of mine in this book was a quiet one in which Thalric was pondering some tough decisions while Che was asleep.

"I should leave, he told himself, not for the first time. Che is not in her right mind. This entire business is madness. But he made no move to go, just looked down at her face in the firelight. We have travelled a long road together, since my men caught you in Helleron, he considered. We shall walk a few miles more in each other's company. Why not?"

As this book progresses their relationship grows more and more, and I loved every bit of it.

Thalric really is a complex character, not quite an antihero, nor a true enemy, he is a man that without saying so, wants to be a good man. Che is the strong heroine for everyone to root for. She also is a mystery in that she was born a Beetle but is now Inapt.

“I am caught between two worlds,’ she considered, as Maure shifted from foot to foot beside her, keen to get away. ‘Child of the new, but scion of the old. Nobody could have intended that, but it has happened, and I refuse to let it become nothing more than a handicap.’ She was speaking quietly, calmly, but with that last word she summoned her will and pushed it through both hands, tearing at the sky with invisible fingers, clutching and dragging and throwing . . .”

Tynisa is truly her father’s daughter, the fearless and relentless killer Tsiamon, whom is just as scary dead now, as he was when he was alive. This book is about the ghost of the legendary warrior and his plans for his broken daughter. Tynisa really is a haunted woman. She is plagued with guilt over her hand in her sister’s lover’s death. She is weighed down with the burden of being the daughter of Stenwolds greatest warrior, and she is beset with the loss and betrayal by her now dead lover. The book unfolds as her world crumbles around her...

There are so many characters in this series worth writing entire reviews on. This book had several side characters that really elevated this book as a whole. Maure, Felipe Shah, Angved, Soul Je, Salma Alain and my favorite the wasp Sentinel Varmen.

This book gave us a much deeper look back to book number four and the end of Tsiamon and the Emperor. Many old plot lines were revisited and made better for it. Tchaikovsky laid out the foundations to the remainder of the series and all I can say is that I cannot wait. The prophecy Che portends is a hint at what is to come:

“Falling leaves, red and brown and black and gold. A rain of burning machines over a city of the Apt. The darkness between trees. The Seal of the Worm is breaking.”

If you like any type of science fiction or fantasy and like your things epic, you need to make it a priority to buy these amazing books. I loved this novel and this series and think that there is so much for all types of readers to get from it...

Madhurabharatula Pranav Rohit Kasinath says

This is a review of the entire series - there are NO spoilers.

When I look back at the Shadows of the Apt, what strikes me at first might seem incongruous to most.

There are no unnecessary descriptions of food.

None at all.

10 books, each of them 400 to 700 pages in length - covering battles, history and multiple points of view - and not a single one of them had any descriptions of food.

Or sex, clothing, family crests, whores or incest.

And I loved it.

Not a single wasted line.

There may be many reasons why the Shadows of the Apt is a success, why you SHOULD read these books no matter how difficult it may get at times. If I had to choose one, however, its this - Tchaikovsky doesn't waste a single page, character or event in his storytelling - the march of story is relentless through thousands of pages, culminating in a satisfying finale.

The World in which the Shadows of the Apt (SOTA) is set is astonishing in its originality. There are no elves, trolls, orcs or dwarves - instead, Tchaikovsky populates this world with Insect Kinden - human beings of different races who derive their primary characteristics from insects. Beetle kinden are slow, plodding, hardworking and intelligent with a flair for statesmanship. The Ant Kinden are warlike and live in each other's heads, attempting to work towards the betterment of the Ant city - a frightening and at the same time amusing allegory for communism. The Mantis Kinden live in the woods, are excellent fighters and are generally rooted in arcane magic and rituals - individualists who are dying out due to adherence to traditions which have lost all meaning. There are Spiders, Moths, Thorn Bugs and Flies each with their own definite characteristics that would require an encyclopedia to cover in entirety. At someone's last count there were close to thirty distinct kinden introduced in the series and I believe that must just be scratching the surface.

Another important differentiating factor amongst the people of this world is Aptitude. The Apt are those who are skilled in the art of artifice, and mechanics. They are scientists, using the laws of nature to change the world around them. Crossbows, artillery and even primitive air power all based on the principles of clockwork make their appearance in the early pages of the series. On the other end of the spectrum however, are the Inapt - the erstwhile rulers of the world to whom the apt were but slaves until a long ago revolution altered the power structure forever. The Inapt live in a world of magic, intuition and prophecy - incapable of so much as unlatching a door, their minds unable to comprehend the machine world in form or function.

This status quo is under threat from the Wasp Kinden of the north - a ferocious warlike race which has come into its own and seeks to conquer the world. While this might sound like a cliché far too common to all fantasy fiction there is an important difference - the Wasps aren't inherently evil. The initial stand off is more one of culture and ideology than of good and evil. Two of my favourite characters are, in fact, Wasps. The only people who are aware of the threat the Wasps pose to the world are the beetle Stenwold Maker, a master in Collegium and his Mantis friend Tisamon. As the series begins Stenwold sends his niece Che, his adopted daughter Tynisa, a spider and his halfbreed student Totho and the dragonfly prince Salme Dien to the factory city of Helleron for espionage against the Wasp empire. Having turned its eyes towards the university city of Collegium, a beacon of enlightenment and artifice in the Lowlands, the Wasps are determined to stop Stenwold Maker at any cost.

Any more would give away the joy of experiencing the plot for yourself. Rest assured, things get complicated very quickly, alliances shift and change, people die and before you know you might find yourself rooting for a villain. Over ten books we are treated to multiple detailed accounts of various battles, war movements and deaths. The narrative moves effortlessly between personal accounts of war and one on one battles. There is a very real sense of forward progression in the book with characters always changing, finding their ideals and comfort zone being challenged on a regular basis and reacting to the world in new ways. These interactions might not always be pleasant and not everyone might walk away from them alive - however, it is wonderful to see such attention to character progression. No one walks out of this book unscathed or unchanged. Some

change for the better, some for the worse - but all changes seem normal, organic and make sense. This series capitalises on this characterisation to make things all the more gripping.

SOTA cannot be labelled as grimdark fantasy either. There is war, death, murder, rape and cruelty. There are slave camps, dying civilisations and loss. A large chunk of characters are dead towards the end of the book. However, there is a resilience to all the characters that makes it possible to believe they will eventually find a way out. It might be because the author is British but all the characters have a stoic, stiff upper lip approach to situations which makes even the darkest segments of the book immensely enjoyable. The dialogue is witty, snappy and fluid - more importantly, it's distinctive in a sense and tailor made to each character. Atrocities, when they are committed are mentioned but not described in detail. This seems to be a more effective method of conveying the horrors of war. I have seen fantasy where rape and murder are described to a distasteful degree under the excuse of realism. Tchaikovsky actually doesn't indulge in voyeurism which significantly increased the emotional impact when bad things eventually DID happen. (Basically books 4 and 10)

A standard fantasy talks about heroism in the face of darkness with a well demarcated line between good and evil. SOTA takes a different tack. While set in a fictional world the themes are often all too relevant. The novels are given over to varied themes - whether duty to oneself comes over and above duty to the city state, are we willing to enslave others so that we may be free, the struggle between the old world and new, between science and superstition. There are also deeper questions about the creation of weapons of war and deterrents- does an inventor take pride in a weapon that has been created solely for killing, and if he is horrified what mental toll does this take? The stark contrast between killing a person yourself and ordering the deaths of hundreds in a mechanised attack is also touched upon. The question asked of a lot of the artificers in this series is whether they feel war has allowed them progress and innovation and whether, coming on the heel of the human cost, this innovation is worth it. A lot of the characters might answer yes. The beauty in Tchaikovsky's characters lies in how easy it is to understand if not exactly sympathise this point of view.

Over the course of the series, we are also treated to innovation and how it can change the face of war. Ranged weapons are deployed against an unarmed infantry, submersibles are invented out of necessity and there is an entire book devoted to an Air War that brings to mind the Battle of Britain and the RAF during World War II. This mechanical progress is a plot point which drives the book forward. The enemy improvising and modifying weapons while the defenders need to think on their feet to win the war and vice versa.

The only criticism I might want to level against this series is that it seems a little too dry at times. Tchaikovsky's prose is fluid, and wonderful on page. However, at times, it fails to convey the images necessary to visualise the world around. I am an extremely visual reader, by which I mean that I enjoy building the environment around me. Tchaikovsky was adequate to this task but I wanted more. However, I choose not to reduce any points for this - This is Tchaikovsky's first work. A ten volume series which serves as a nuanced account of the wages of war in a fantasy world. It is rare for anyone to get something **THIS RIGHT** on the first round and I am sure he will only get better as he continues to write more.

The SOTA is unlike any fantasy I have read in a long long time - nuanced, with wonderful characterisation, multiple plot threads and points of view and absolutely no narrative drag. It begins, builds to a crescendo and ends almost perfectly. I don't recommend this to just lovers of fantasy but to all lovers of good literature. Don't turn your nose down on this, you won't be disappointed.

Arkadeb says

A book that began very weakly, but kept on improving and managed to end on a high note. The ending was not perfect, I have a couple of problems with it, but it helped cap some pretty deft character development that ran through the book. Also Books 8-10 seem to have been set up, and it will be interesting to see how the main conflict picks up again

Algernon says

I find it hard to believe this is already the seventh book in the Shadows of the Apt series. It feels as full of energy and invention as the first one, something none of the other big epic series going to seven volumes or above managed for me. They all seemed to lose steam or to wander slightly aimlessly around the plot, wondering how to reach the requisite number of pages. I got this feeling with Wheel of Time, with Sword of Shadows, with Crown of Stars, even with Steven Erikson or George R R Martin.

Adrian Tchaikovsky doesn't seem to have any problem. There are still places on the map to explore, cultures and myths to flesh out, characters that need to discover themselves or to reinvent themselves.

The cover of Heirs of the Blade is extremely appropriate: this book is less about big battles, city sieges or technological inventions. This one is about individuals and their prowess with their weapon of choice. It is the turn of Tynisa to take center stage and to find out what she really is: a Spider kinden who will manipulate others, or a bloodthirsty Weaponmaster with a death wish that is as much a danger to her friends as to her enemies.

The arena where our heroes perform is now the Commonweal, with a detour in Khanapes that serves to link the book with The Scarab Path and with the overall epic plot. In this, the last installment feels less like a vacation / sidetrip than The Sea Watch. Cheerwell and Thalric also play a major role in the story, and connect the dots that were left open after the events in Khanapes.

I don't usually like it when an author introduces new main characters so late in the series, but surprisingly I became much involved in the fate of the new faces, especially Dal Arche and his Sherwood Forest brotherhood and Varmen "Pride of the Six" and the last of the imperial Ironclads. They are not really new, and their background is fleshed out in some of the short stories recommended by the author in a blog post here as a good introduction to Heirs of the Blade.

Here's an extract of what I liked about Dalla:

"A bandit, a man-hunter, a lawbreaker, a bow for hire. I never wanted any grand cause. If it looks like I'm fighting tyrants, it's only because the world's so damned full of them that you can't draw a sword without crossing some of their laws. Easy as easy, it is, to become an outlaw."

Eric says

4 Stars

An excellent addition to the series that continues to expand on previous worldbuilding and introduces a number of new and interesting characters. While Heirs of the Blade still had some of the same issues I've

had in the 2 previous books, it marked an overall improvement and return to the faster pace of the beginning of the series.

Book 5 was all about Che. Book 6 was all about Stenwold. Now it's Tynisa's turn, as Stenwold's adopted daughter travels far from her friends and family. Driven away by the deaths of her father, her love, and her role in the death of Acheos, she seeks out the Commonweal, Salma's home, though what she's searching for even she isn't exactly sure of. When she arrives, she finds the Commonweal very different than she expected. Meanwhile Che and Thalric are hunting her down, seeking to find her before the ghost of her slain father Tisamon can reach her. While she seeks her sister, Che starts to discover that her encounter with the Masters of Khanphes has left her irrevocably changed.

Tchaikovsky has done it again, creating yet another fully realized culture and populating it with a new set of characters, each of which felt real and distinct. This time we it's the Dragonfly Commonweal that we spend time in. I've been interested in the Dragonfly kinden since the first book so I was very curious to find out more about their culture and learn a bit of the history to their Twelve Year War with the Wasps. Tchaikovsky didn't disappoint, creating something that felt both different to other societies seen so far and entirely real. He also did a fantastic job showing the impact that not only fighting but losing a long war has on a nation.

There was a new series of characters as well, from Dragonfly nobles and war veterans to brigands and outlaws. Several of them left a strong impression despite their newness and not a great deal of page time. As someone who has written two fantasy books (unpublished as of now, sadly), I'm very impressed with how he manages to create memorable secondary characters in a short period of time. We also get to see some returning characters as well, with a few others thrown in alongside the primary ones of Tynisa, Che, and Thalric. I have to single Thalric out for particular praise. His transition from a villain to a reluctant ally to someone who isn't quite sure himself which side he is on has been handled masterfully, and he is perhaps my favorite character in the entire series.

My only real issue with the book is that it took a while to get going. Tynisa at points was a struggle to read about, her grief and guilt becoming a burden to slog through. Although those parts probably should be uncomfortable and difficult based on the topic, there were times I was glad when the focus shifted off Tynisa.

The first 4 books of the series were all out war. The last 3 books have been slowly fleshing out the world and building to the next confrontation. Despite my occasional frustration with the slow progression of the overall plot, I can see how Tchaikovsky is moving all the pieces into place and I think my patience is going to pay off as the series starts moving to its conclusion. I can't wait to see what happens next.
