


Operation Arcana

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In the realms of fantasy, the battlefield is where heroism comes alive, magic is unleashed, and legends are made and unmade. From the War of the Ring, Tolkien's epic battle of good versus evil, to The Battle of the Blackwater, George R.R. Martin's grim portrait of the horror and futility of war, these fantastical conflicts reflect our highest hopes and darkest fears, bringing us mesmerizing visions of silver spears shining in the sun and vast hordes of savage beasts who threaten to destroy all that we hold dear.

Now acclaimed editor John Joseph Adams is sounding the battle cry and sixteen of today's top authors are reporting for duty, spinning never-before-published, spellbinding tales of military fantasy, including a Black Company story from Glen Cook, a Paksenarrion story from Elizabeth Moon, and a Shadow Ops story by Myke Cole. Within these pages you'll also find World War I trenches cloaked in poison gas and sorcery, modern day elite special forces battling hosts of the damned, and steampunk soldiers fighting for their lives in a world torn apart by powers that defy imagination.

Featuring both grizzled veterans and fresh young recruits alike, including Tanya Huff, Simon R. Green, Carrie Vaughn, Jonathan Maberry, and Seanan McGuire, Operation Arcana is a must for any military buff or fantasy fan. You'll never look at war the same way again.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Elizabeth Moon

Tobias Buckell & David Klecha

Myke Cole

Jonathan Maberry

Genevieve Valentine

Django Wexler

Yoon Ha Lee

Weston Ochse

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Ari Marmell

Tanya Huff

Carrie Vaughn

TC McCarthy

Glen Cook

Simon R. Green

Seanan McGuire

Linda Nagata

At the publisher's request, this title is sold without DRM (Digital Rights Management).

About John Joseph Adams:

“John Joseph Adams has become one of those editors who I know will put together something I will love to read and know that the book I’m about to purchase isn’t going to let me down.” —Wil Wheaton

“Merits a place on fantasy fans’ bookshelves.” —*Publishers Weekly*, on *Epic: Legends of Fantasy*

“A genuine triumph. . . . [A] ‘must buy’ for every sci-fan you know.” —*Romantic Times*, a “Top Pick” for February 2013, on *The Mad Scientist’s Guide to World Domination*

John Joseph Adams—called “the reigning king of the anthology world” by Barnes & Noble.com—is the bestselling editor of many anthologies, such as *Under the Moons of Mars: New Adventures on Barsoom*, *Brave New Worlds*, *Wastelands*, *The Living Dead*, *The Living Dead 2*, *By Blood We Live*, *Federations*, *The Improbable Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, and *The Way of the Wizard*. He is a two-time finalist for the Hugo Award and a three-time finalist for the World Fantasy Award. He is also the editor and publisher of *Lightspeed Magazine*, and is the co-host of Wired.com’s *The Geek’s Guide to the Galaxy* podcast.

Operation Arcana Details

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From Reader Review Operation Arcana for online ebook

Maggie says

Did not finish.

As an LOTR fan, the first story was cool and had me cracking up at things like FOB Hammerhand, etc. Then there was the story about the Russian Night Witches and that was awesome. The story about the golem was ok. The others were just not very good and I gave up on the rest of the collection.

Fangs for the Fantasy says

Rules of Enchantment by David Klecha & Tobias S Buckell

The Damned One Hundred by Jonathan Maberry

Blood, Ash, Braids by Genevieve Valentine

Mercenary's Honour by Elizabeth Moon

The Guns of the Waste by Django Wexler

The Graphology of Hemorrhage by Yoon Ha Lee

American Golem by Weston Ochse

Weapons in the Earth by Myke Cole

Heavy Sulfer by Ari Marmell

Steel Ships by Tanya Huff

Seal Skin by Carrie Vaughn

Pathfinder by T.C McCarthy

Bomber's Moon by Simon R Green

In Skeleton Leaves by Seanan McGuire

Bone Eaters by Glen Cook

The Way Home by Linda Nagata

This anthology is connected by 2 things: soldiers and speculative fiction. Which is a pretty broad remit which I think is probably the main flaw of this book. It isn't a major flaw because there is a lot of overlap in the speculative fiction fandom, but the bringing of high fantasy, sci-fi and urban fantasy together with such little connection doesn't make it that coherent but I don't think that's especially needed; though some of the stories seem a bit out of place. I think it also helped that there are only 16 stories in this anthology – I've read a few lately that have a truly immense number of stories that tend to leave me thoroughly sick of the book before I'm half way through (and the fact I say "only" with 16 tells you how long they've been).

I'll be honest, I kind of expected lots of action scenes and little in the way of plot – short stories and big epic fights don't leave much room for anything else. Yes, I had low expectations (and a little semi-guilty expectation of shameless epic action which, yes, I like, I admit it) and they were countered – a lot of these stories are surprisingly deep with either very original settings or fascinating conflicts.

In terms of original setting, I'm most impressed by In Skeleton Leaves by Seanan McGuire. A truly dark and downright disturbing retelling of Peter Pan and the Lost Boys war against the pirates. It's dark, draws on some excellent elements of the Fisher King and is wonderfully thematic and dark and just plain eerie and

slightly horrifying. It also has a fascinating retake on Wendy and Pan, turning them into titles – with male Wendys and female Pan being possible. It's creepy and wonderful and shuddery-awesome

The Graphology of Hemorrhage by Yoon Ha Lee isn't exactly an original setting per se – but the magic style of calligraphy presented is the most original concept in the book and related to, but utterly unlike anything I've read before. The art of written magic, of literature and culture and writing all underpinning magic which, in turn, comes at a terrible price for the caster is eerie and original and beautiful and, ultimately, tragic. The ending is desperately sad and bleak in its power. The wizard is a woman as well – and the characters are all East Asian.

I think Rules of Enchantment by David Klecha & Tobias S Buckell is probably the story I'd most want to see develop into a full novel and full series. Earth with portals opening up to a High Fantasy world with trolls and orcs invading Earth and human soldiers having to make alliances with elves and battle against the invaders. What I really like about it is the interesting way magic and technology meet – from helicopter gunships shooting trolls to using magic to give a military squad a more unified viewpoint and almost a hive mind. What I absolutely hate about this story, though, is it is written in the second person. This never ever ever ever works – I've never liked it. We follow one squad which includes a female soldier (who uses her mind bond to keep wandering-eyed men to focus) and it has a latino character as well.

There were several stories in this book which drew on real world conflicts. We've said before repeatedly how bad this could go with lots of appropriation but in general it didn't go there. These taking of real world wars didn't assert that magic caused the war or the atrocities within it – it's just taking our world, adding magic and seeing how the mechanics of war would differ by adding woo-woo while not actually have it change the personalities involved

The Guns of the Waste by Django Wexler is a close competitor – the setting is steampunk alternate world with a racially diverse cast (including a protagonist and most of the cast) with several capable female characters holding military rank and a range of religions and cultures being developed in a very wide world that is nicely touched upon in very elegant, sparse writing. We get a powerful sense of the different cultures without having to go into too much detail and bogging down the story. We have a dire threat which has a wonderful sinister sense and some of that lovely epic conflict I was looking for.

Mercenary's Honour by Elizabeth Moon is a high fantasy story centring around mercenaries. It's not my favourite but it has interesting musing on loyalty, honour and contracts – conflicting loyalties and, interesting, the idea of how much a commander actually owes their soldiers. It's an interesting take on honour which often looks at honour towards your enemies or loyalty to your lord – but what about the men under your command? It also has an aspect of looking at what an elderly mercenary – and one with a disability – does as he ages.

Blood, Ash and Braids by Genevieve Valentine is a World War 2 story following a squad of Russian female pilots. The Night Witches – actually drawing on the history of the real Night Witches and mentioning several of these actual women including Marina Raskova, Yevdokia Bershanskaya and Nadezhda Popova. This works without being too dubious because there is very little woo-woo in the story. The woo-woo comes from one of the pilots being an actual witch – but the way it is written it could equally be a superstition as much as actual magic (it's also a really fascinating magic system) making it more of a reality based tale of these women's heroism than “how they did it because woo-woo”

Heavy Sulfer by Ari Marmell is a World War 1 story – the British forces on the western front only now we

have wizards among the machine guns controlling clouds of mustard gas and demons summoned in the trenches. It's a fascinatingly well done and it's an amazing combination I really just revelled in.

The characterisation isn't bad... but kind of nothing new even with a nice twist at the end. They do include a female officer, her magic making her valuable and it's clear that women are welcome in the arm because woo-woo isn't limited to gender

Pathfinder by T.C McCarthy takes on the Korean war and, again, sensibly keeps the supernatural somewhat away from the conflict. War, with its brutality, its loss and the devastating pain as well as complex loyalties is all there in its human horror. The woo-woo is peripheral, there is a supernatural conflict using the war as a setting, covered by the war but not actually causing, affecting or being affected by the war; it's one of the ways you can use these settings without appropriating it or lessening the scope of them and it's well done. Our protagonist is a Korean woman, most of the cast is Korean and it seems to draw heavily from Korean beliefs. Her role as comfort and guide for the dying makes for a tragic yet bittersweet story and one where woo-woo doesn't cure everything, but does make everything more bearable and understood.

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Ivan says

As with most anthologies, there were several excellent stories, but more that were mediocre - even when written by authors whom I love and respect. Nevertheless, this was one of the few anthologies that I actually managed to finish from end to end so I guess I can recommend it to those readers who love military fantasy. Although Rules of Enchantment by David Klecha & Tobias S. Buckell was my favorite, I think that the best story in the anthology was In Skeleton Leaves by Seanan McGuire. This one has all the hallmarks of a true classic. I probably liked The Way Home by Linda Nagata the least, although the story is quite well written, but it just failed to speak to my interests, I guess.

Black Company story was a real treat, but I must say that an anthology with this thematic that lacks a story by Steven Erikson is flawed at the start. I don't know if Mr. Adams approached Mr. Erikson or not - and even if he did, Erikson is really not a short story writer, but this had to be mentioned.

Nathan Miller says

Overall, the general philosophy behind the collection of stories in this anthology might be expressed as something like, "What if we were to plop our army guys into our D&D game?" The results ran a wide and fascinating gamut, some focusing on modern military in a supernatural setting, while others went the other way and featured supernatural creatures crossing paths with something in our own world. In a few stories, war is quite literally hell. Okay, so we didn't quite get Cthulhu in power armor (no, really...Google it), but if we assume, if only for a little while, that things like goblins and selkies are real, what the imagination conjures can be quite interesting and even chilling.

Althea Ann says

**** RULES OF ENCHANTMENT—David Klecha & Tobias S. Buckell**

Tolkien's world and our own have had a portal open between them. It's taking both modern military technology and strategic alliances to fight off threats such as trolls and dragons. Unfortunately, I didn't really like the second-person voice, and the tongue-in-cheek style with geeky references to D&D and the LoTR movies didn't do it for me either.

****** THE DAMNED ONE HUNDRED—Jonathan Maberry**

Classic sword-and-sorcery, plus vampires, plus a situation reminiscent of the Battle of Thermopylae. I really enjoyed this one.

****** BLOOD, ASH, BRAIDS—Genevieve Valentine**

Historically interesting, AND a rousing good tale. A group of Russian WWII fighter pilots, all women, are assigned horribly dangerous missions. A bit of witchcraft may help them stay alive...

****** MERCENARY'S HONOR—Elizabeth Moon**

I'm sure a lot of people will buy this anthology just for this story - a 'Paksworld' tale - and I don't believe they'll be disappointed. Familiar characters (including Kieri Phelan and Halveric) make their appearance, but this is a fully stand-alone, and cleverly entertaining tale of two mercenary commanders and how they work out a situation which initially seems untenable for both of them.

**** THE GUNS OF THE WASTES—Django Wexler**

Bonus points for being what I personally feel that steampunk ought to be (weird sci-fi, not faux-Victorian romance). However, this is really a fun action scene with quirky characters, rather than a fully-developed story. It feels like (and I hope it might be) an excerpt from a forthcoming novel.

******* THE GRAPHOLOGY OF HEMORRHAGE—Yoon Ha Lee**

I really enjoy Yoon Ha Lee's takes on the ideas of lexical magic. I found echoes here of some of her other work: 'Effigy Nights' and 'Iseul's Lexicon' - but this is a piece that works on its own.

A brilliant magician has been forced into a dangerous military position in official retribution for the groundbreaking - but status-quo-threatening - ideas she came up with in university. Now, her mission will require her to explore even more radical ideas - and may demand the ultimate self-sacrifice.

**** AMERICAN GOLEM—Weston Ochse**

The main character goes AWOL in Afghanistan to pursue his true mission: to kill the Osama-bin-Laden-like terrorist who was responsible for his brother's death. The twist is: the 'brother' is actually a golem, created just for this purpose. The author has clearly drawn on his own experiences in Afghanistan to inform this story.

**** WEAPONS IN THE EARTH—Myke Cole**

A long and rather harrowing story of a group of goblins from a nomadic tribe who have been taken prisoner by their enemies. It's a quite bleak and agonizing experience.

**** HEAVY SULFUR—Ari Marmell**

Alternate-history WWI, with trench warfare and mages on both sides summoning spirits and demons. A dangerous mission behind enemy lines, with a magical element thrown into the mix.

*** STEEL SHIPS—Tanya Huff

A quick, action-oriented episode. Selkie-type shapeshifters in the midst of a war come up with a dangerous mission to protect their side from the threat of the enemy's new ironclad riverboats. Feels like an excerpt from a longer tale.

*** SEALSKIN—Carrie Vaughn

A burnt-out American military man goes to Ireland, like so many tourists, in search of his 'roots' - and faces a dramatic decision about which part of his heritage to choose to follow.

*** PATHFINDER—T.C. McCarthy

In an underground military hospital complex in Korea, a young nurse fulfills her traditional/supernatural role of escorting the souls of the dead to the afterlife. However, both her jobs are full of more than the usual hazards, both paranormal and mundane.

**** BONE EATERS—Glen Cook

The Black Company is back! And in classic form! This is another one where fans of the series may very well find this one story alone worth the price of admission.

I'll defer to those who are more detail-oriented if I'm wrong, but the events here seem to take place around the time of the events in 'The White Rose.' Croaker is the annalist and narrator, and Darling is the leader of the Company. The group is magically led to a village of Hungry Ghosts, and must use ingenuity to escape and/or nullify the threat.

Will Cook's long-promised further entries into this series be finally forthcoming soon? We can only hope...

** MOON—Simon R. Green

This is an example of exactly what I don't like alternate history to do. It takes a morally and politically complex real-life situation (the bombing of Dresden) and attempts to remove any ambiguity from it by adding in a compelling reason for the attack which never existed, and quite literally making it a battle between the forces of Good and Evil, complete with a misguided, traitorous opponent to the action. I'm sure some will see this as nothing more than an action story, but I see it as a misguided attempt to assuage historical guilt through rewriting.

**** IN SKELETON LEAVES—Seanan McGuire

Recommended for those who enjoyed Lisa Jensen's 'Alias Hook' and/or who are interested in darker explorations of the Peter Pan story. What happened in Neverland after the stories of Peter that we're all familiar with? Is the otherworld as stable as it seemed, or might it change, gradually and depending on the children that are brought to it? Children can be not just heartless, but vicious, and there's always a disturbing aspect to not growing up.

*** THE WAY HOME—Linda Nagata

A military team has somehow been caught in a hostile otherworld populated by attacking demons. By trial and error, they've learned that each death opens a temporary portal home - for only one soldier. Can the commander manage to get every member of his team home safely?

Many thanks to NetGalley and Baen books for the opportunity to read this anthology of quality military fantasy! As always, my opinion is solely my own.

Django Wexler says

I'm probably a little biased when it comes to my own story, but now that I've read them all there's a lot of good stuff in here!

Squirrel says

Worst collection in memory, partly reflecting the value of a good title.

Arcana - noun: arcanum; plural noun: arcana secrets or mysteries.

[As in Major Arcana from the popular Tarot card decks.]

This book holds neither secrets nor mysteries, nor the magic one might anticipate given the title. Even usually top authors contributed writing I found mediocre, unoriginal, and depressing. Skip it.

Gökçe says

Çok çok iyi. Uzun inceleme gelecek

Damion says

I found it somewhat disappointing in general and a bit misleading.

Why? Well the cover and title imply its an anthology of short stories in which the majority of it has to do with modern military forces versus the arcane.

Though turns out....more fantasy settings ranging from nothing to do with the military at all to a handful of stories featuring modern soldiers.

The story of Sealskin for example didn't really bring anything to the table by making the character a soldier. May as well have been any other profession with the character being fit and trained in martial arts.

Mitch says

Rules of Enchantment - A forgettable story about marines versus elves. Yeah, you read that right. Could've been cool like Halo crossed over with Legend of Zelda. Would've worked had it had more of a plot. Should've tried harder to explain what the heck was going on (besides shooting and screaming).

The Damned One Hundred - Personal pet peeve for fantasy books is authors referring to their character's age in seasons, like so-and-so is eight summers old. Does being in a fantasy automatically cause all your characters to not know the concept of a year? But otherwise, great short story inspired by Thermopylae with a twist.

Blood, Ash, Braids - Female combat pilots (who are actually witches)? As crazy as it sounds, this one

actually worked. Magical realism, weight of war, and all that. I can't believe this is by the author of The Girls at the Kingfisher Club (which I didn't particularly care for).

Mercenary's Honor - Pretty much generic fantasy. Too much talk about countries and armies and just *talk*. Meh.

The Guns of the Wastes - Again, the problem with a lot of short story authors is forgetting they're not trying to tell a novel length story in short form, it's more about honing in on one idea/aspect/topic and going with it. I can see Wexler's point with this, but because of the background required for the 'real' story to work it feels too small.

The Graphology of Hemorrhage - Hands down the best title since Babylon 5's The Deconstruction of Falling Stars. An interestingly philosophical take on the ramifications of war as well.

American Golem - A bit obvious and played straight, but not bad at all.

Heavy Sulfur - World War I with magic. Don't see much of a point and there are many better alternate histories of WWI out there.

Steel Ships - Steel ships? You mean ironclads? Unfortunately despite the heavy dialogue I'm still not sure what the point of the plot was...

Sealskin - (view spoiler) Umm ok.

Pathfinder & Bone Eaters - Not sure I get these...

Bomber's Moon - Angels flying with Allied pilots against the Nazis. Except the angel didn't add anything to the story except give the Allies the moral high ground over the Nazis, which frankly I don't need an angel to tell me, so this was a miss.

In Skeleton Leaves - Did Seanan McGuire just write a Peter Pan inspired short story? I'm usually a fan of hers, but I've read this three times and I'm still not sure I get it. (view spoiler) Isn't that antithetical to the whole point of Peter Pan?

The Way Home - Wow I wish this was a full length novel. Great concept, excellent focus, awesome writing. Did I mention I wish this was a full length novel?

Nathan says

Operation Arcana turned out to be a fairly short collection of stories that had only one directive; each short had to deal with military and fantasy- every other detail was left to the authors. While I have read themed collections before this one felt quite a bit different. It is hard to pin down but I think I am used to short stories trying (sometimes a bit too hard) to deliver a message and there isn't much of that here. Not that there were not important things being said in some of these stories, but it was one of the loosest feeling collections I have ever read.

As would be expected from a multi-author anthology the quality varied; a couple of great stories, a couple of

low points, but mostly filled with good entertainment. I never know how to rate a collection beyond 'worth reading' or 'not' so I will classify this one in the probably worth reading category for even casual fantasy fans. As is my way I refuse to rate individual short stories but instead point out a few highlights.

The Damned One Hundred by Jonathan Maberry was the second story in and the first to really catch my attention. One big heroic act is needed and damned if it doesn't stand out. I love it when a short story gives me as much history as a novel; or at least enough to make me feel like it has.

Immediately next comes Genevieve Valentine's Blood, Ash, Braids. Valentine is always a highlight in any collection and it is no different here; one of a couple World War II retellings and easily the best. Witches in outdated bi-planes, what else would you need to know?

Yoon Ha Lee is a new author to me but I quite enjoyed The Graphology of Hemorrhage, a story that breaks away from the battle heavy theme and deals with the subterfuge aspects of war instead. I am always interested in language and it is that, along with a little bit of magic, that provides the key to bittersweet success in this story.

Fantasy Review Barn

The absolute highlight for me though came from a very surprising place. In Skeleton Leaves by Seanan McGuire wins the collection. I was not surprised because of who the author was, I have heard many good things about her work. Rather I was surprised by the subject matter, one Peter Pan. I have absolutely no interest in the Peter Pan world but now there is one exception. This isn't a happy Neverland story, dealing with a never ending war and child soldiers with no option of growing up. Proof that even old stories can be used in completely original ways.

Most of the other stories were serviceable enough, some of them better than others. As I mentioned there were only two I didn't enjoy (Simon R Green's was as over the top and unnecessary as anything else I have read by the man, Mike Cole's story felt like something I should like but I never was able to click with it). This was also a collection that didn't have any stories that pushed the boundary of the 'short' description, something I appreciated as I flew through it in a single day. Over all I am glad to have read it and once again found a few new authors to watch for.

Copy for review received via NetGalley from publisher.

Matthew says

A cracking anthology filled with great stories. I really enjoyed the diversity shown by the contributors. Highly recommended for all fans of military fantasy.

Evgeny says

Please note: this review will be updated as I read more stories from the anthology.

So as I mentioned this is an anthology of short fantasy stories. The collection consists of the following:

Bone Eaters by *Glen Cook*.

The tale takes part between the second and the third books of the main series. A whole lot of familiar faces are back, including Darling, Lieutenant, Elmo, Silent, Otto, Hagop, Goblin, and One-Eye. A group of highway robbers was stupid enough to try robbing some scouts from The Black Company. The surviving robbers were taken prisoners; it turned out they are interesting people - to put it mildly. Let us just say The Company got even into bigger troubles than before.

This was **the** reason I got my hands on this anthology. People familiar with my reviews know I love the series. This was a decent read. It is nice to be back with the old gang which for ones had too many wizards with the more timid of them being Goblin and One-Eye.

This should tell how big trouble the Company was in this time. I love Croaker's conclusion in the end of the tale. **4 stars** is the rating.

So the final rating for now is **4 stars** which I will update later with review of more stories.

Paul Anderson says

Writers learn to write by reading the works of other writers. We learn to write well by reading good stories and analyzing what works and what doesn't. Here are some things I learned by reading *Operation Arcana*, an anthology of science-fictional war stories edited by John Joseph Adams, forthcoming from Baen Books in March 2015.

In "Rules of Enchantment," the first story in *Operation Arcana*, you view things through the group mind of US Marines battling Orcs and Trolls in a modern version of Tolkien's mythological universe. The story is ingenious, but the POV takes some getting used to. You see things through multiple eyes simultaneously, and you're not quite sure who you are at any given moment. The Marines are on the other side of the rift, in a land where magic works as well as conventional weapons, and tactical spells like Tactician's Weave and glamours to disguise magical beings as humans are commonplace and real. Well-written and full of action, this splendid tale sets the tone for the wonderful stories that follow.

Jonathan Mayberry's "The Damned One Hundred" is a retelling of the classic story of 300 Greeks who battled Persians at Thermopylae, except Mayberry adds witches and vampires to the mix to make the story more exciting. "Blood, Ash, Braids" is about witches, too, but modern-day (circa 1943) witches who fly planes instead of brooms. It's also about giving one's all for one's country and one's friends.

"The Guns of the Wastes" is a superbly-crafted tale of a shavetail lieutenant fresh from the academy encountering an alien enemy for the first time. Django Wexler flawlessly blends steampunk landcruisers, alien mechanical spiders, and military fiction into a more than satisfying story.

"The Graphology of Hemorrhage" by Yoon Ha Lee could aptly have been re-titled "Shadow Soup." To make shadow soup you must first catch a shadow, add whatever vegetables you can steal, and boil it long enough to make it palatable or nourishing. Lee provides lots of nourishment in this palatable story about shadow characters, love, war, and the meaning and making of words.

"American Golem," surprisingly, is directly related to "The Graphology of Hemorrhage." Both stories are about war and the power of words, of symbols. The word golem itself means "my unshaped form." Author Weston Ochse claims the Jews of Prague learned to make golems from the ancient Chinese. A Jew and a Navajo medicine woman create a half-human killing machine—a golem, a kachina--from the ashes of a dead American soldier. The symbols for revenge are etched on the golem's forehead, and the blood of its maker assures the golem of immortality. The story is not only about fulfilling a mission and extracting revenge, but about self-sacrifice and what it means to be human. That theme—whether intended or unintended--seems to

run through all of the stories in this marvelous book.

“Heavy Sulfur” is a WWI story of trench warfare and magic. Author Ari Marmell weaves a spell of High Magick straight from the annals of the Golden Dawn. Both English and German forces use sorcerers and necromancers to win the Great War, and Corporal Cleary is caught in the middle. Like other characters in Operation Arcana, Cleary is called upon to make the supreme sacrifice.

Hae Jung is a “Pathfinder.” As a People’s Republic nurse, Hae Jung tends dying soldiers in Korea in 1951. She is also a Pathfinder who guides the dying to their ancestors. T. C. McCarthy tells a heart-breaking tale of death and dying from the viewpoint of America’s Korean War enemy. This story is so well-written that I couldn’t stop reading despite the blood and horrors that assaulted my senses.

Glen Cook is an old friend. He’s a quiet, unassuming kind of guy who loves books as much as I do. “Bone Eaters” is a Black Company tale, and Cook is a master craftsman. He is also a guest of honor at this year’s World Fantasy Con in Saratoga Springs, NY. One can learn a lot by reading Glen Cook. Cook’s style is a bit like Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore at their best. Hungry ghosts, hunger incarnate, populate this story along with Croaker’s band of misfits. Chasing Midnight, a new addition to the company of wizards, is intriguing. Croker, the Annalist who worries about secret meanings hidden in words, records the events in his own words. He uses images like “Darling had us drafted and rolling as quick as it took the buzzard family to complete a couple of circles around the sky.” Glen Cook is always a good read.

“Bomber’s Moon” is about flying with the angels. It has been said that if God had meant man to fly, He would have given man wings. But with Hitler forming a pact with the devil, God has chosen sides and has granted man wings. The Archangel Uriel flies with the bomber’s crew, the bomber’s cannons have been replaced with water cannons spraying Holy water, the bombs have been blessed, the bullets have crosses etched into the lead. What could possibly go wrong? Himmler and Goebbels are in Dresden conjuring demons, and the crew heads to Dresden to destroy the city. What happens when the plane is hit by flak, their guardian angel deserts them, and the men are left without a prayer? A pacifist priest steps in and adds yet another complication to the story. Author Simon R. Green tells a gripping story that keeps the reader turning pages until the end.

I got to sit next to Seanan McGuire during an autographing session at Windycon. “In Skeleton Leaves” is the first Seanan McGuire story I’ve read. Set in a nightmare version of Peter Pan’s Neverland where The Pan is female and Wendys are a dime a dozen, this gender-bending tale of Lost Girls and Boys gives new meaning to the fun and games of childhood play. When Pans grow up or die, they are replaced by another Pan and the never-ending war in Neverland between the Pirates and the Lost Children continues forever. Pans are liars and fliers. And McGuire adds a few unexpected twists and turns to the tale before one final twist of the knife. If this is an example of McGuire’s imagination, I want to read all of her writing.

The entire anthology is lots of fun. There are a few important lessons to be learned about war and writing and the sacrifices that both require.

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Mike says

I'm not one to typically read short story collections or anthologies but the theme behind the latest John Joseph Adams' edited *Operation Arcana* was sufficiently intriguing to pique my interest. The focus of *Operation Arcana* is on military fantasy and includes a wonderful list of contributors. The stories in *Operation Arcana* run the gamut from high action, to more subtle meditations of war and combat. By and large *Operation Arcana* is full of tight, entertaining fiction. I'm not going to go through every story in the anthology but there were really a handful of stories that absolutely blew me away.

Ari Marmell's *Heavy Sulfur* offers an interesting take on the First World War; an area not often covered in fantasy fiction. Marmell grounds the story in reality; injecting it with subtle magic; it's a unique backdrop and one I'd be interested in seeing employed more often. I skipped over Weston Ochese's goofy-titled *Seal Team 666* but his story here, *American Golem*, has me seriously reconsidering that decision. Featuring some serious action and a quiet meditation on the horror of war and the nature of existence make for a well-rounded and entrancing story. Myke Cole's *Weapons of the Earth*, deals goblins and takes place in the magical Source seen in his *Shadow Ops* novels. While the *Shadow Ops* series has offered glimpses into the lives and culture of the goblins, *Weapons of the Earth* really delves into things as it focuses on a tribe of nomadic goblins who are being held as POWs by a less benevolent set of goblins. *Weapons of the Earth* is a real eye opener and I sincerely hope that Cole follows up with more short fictions set in the world of *Shadow Ops*; it'd be neat to get something from the Naga! I was extremely impressed with Seanan McGuire's *In Skeleton Leaves*. In this story she reworks the story of Peter Pan in a very dark way; it is an interesting look at being forced to grow up in a land where that is supposed to be impossible.

Oddly the story I was most excited about, a *Black Company* story by Glen Cook called *Bone Eaters*, I found extraordinarily difficult to get into. Maybe it's been too long since I've finished the *Black Company* series combine with the fact that *Bone Eaters* takes place right around the events of *The White Rose*. It wasn't bad in anyway but it was difficult going back to cast of character who, to me at least, have been mostly dead for a number of years. Perhaps it's about time I went back and re-read *The Black Company* novels. While I've only discussed a handful of stories that I thought were the best in the anthology there were no real disappointments (outside the above). Each and every story in *Operation Arcana* is a fine read with many offering a unique take on the anthology's premise. *Operation Arcana* is an anthology that I whole-heartedly recommend to anyone and everyone who enjoy exciting military themed fantasy fiction.
