



The Air War

Adrian Tchaikovsky

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All is in turmoil as the world moves towards war. In Solarno, the spies watch each other and ready their knives, while Myna sees the troops muster at its border and emotions run high as it vows never to be enslaved again. In Collegium, the students argue politics, too late to turn the tide. In the heart of the Empire, new pilots have completed their secretive training, generals are being recalled to service and armies are ready to march. Their Empress, the heir to two worlds, intends to claim her birthright. And nothing – either within the Empire or beyond it – will stand in her way. A conflict is coming, the like of which the insect-kind have never seen.

The Air War Details

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From Reader Review The Air War for online ebook

Jasper says

Originally posted at <http://thebookplank.blogspot.com/2013...>

Having finally been able to catch up with this series with Heirs of the Blade last month I was thrilled to continue the story once again in The Air War. So far the Shadows of the Apt series hasn't let me down once and Adrian Tchaikovsky just keeps on amazing me with his rich and interesting world and the characters that inhabit it. Heirs of the Blade showed several pieces of the storyline that will play an important role in the finale of the series and I thought that they would be more explored in The Air War, but this isn't really the case. The Air War focuses on revisiting several events and happening that went on earlier in the series, but this time explores them in the fullest detail and though The Air War isn't a direct follow up of book #7, it didn't let me down again. Because by this revisiting of the several earlier events, you get a much better grip on the threat that the Empire imposes but also gives a better grip on the technology and everything that makes the world go round. This is one of the strongest points of the series. Adrian Tchaikovsky keeps on taking the series further with new material but keeps to the true nature of the story with using earlier explored things. This is what makes epic fantasy. Top material.

With already the eighth book in the series I will try to keep spoilers to a minimum and give a general description!

The Air War starts off with a completely different cast than what we were used to in the last book. Most of the characters that have been focused on aren't making a big appearance. Che, Thalric and Tynisa won't make an appearance and Seda's character only takes up a small part of the book. First off, the book is divided into two parts. The first is called "The Calm" now I could immediately guess where this might be aimed for... because there is also the calm before the... yes that's right Storm. And the second part is called that. The Air War's title is self-explanatory and this is where the focus lies within the book, where the warring threats first occurred on ground, they are now translated to the skies. The aspect of air warfare was explored in a few books back already but now comes to full color in The Air War, laying a heavy emphasis on the steampunk and technology of the book.

The first part of the book focuses a lot on setting the storyline up for the second part of the book. Introducing the new characters and on the first go letting it seem that everything is just normal in Collegium, showing a new quartet of students taking several tests but on the other hand taking place in a different place you have the slow rise of the Empire. This way of exposing the storyline was done in a great way. Several of the storylines that you follow include Taki, who starts off the story and finds out that the Empire is amassing a new way of aerial warfare with new technology. Laszlo, who acts as an agent for Stenwold maker in the city of Solarno, an Assassin Bug kinden who has the power to shape shift and is tasked with assassinating Seda, Seda herself, and that of Stenwold Maker. It was a solid decision to reintroduce several past characters, Adrian Tchaikovsky's characterization is strong and when I just read the names of several characters, immediately several images and their backgrounds directly leapt to mind. From these different storylines most of them all converge into one in the end, as you have the defenders of Collegium trying to fend off the war with the Empire and the point of view of the Empire trying to invade and achieve what couldn't be done earlier. I really liked how Adrian Tchaikovsky showed both sides of the story as this gives you a great feeling for several characters and even though Stenwold and his crew are the good guys in the series and the Empire the bad guys, it didn't automatically want me to root for Stenwold. Adrian Tchaikovsky does a great job in highlighting both sides.

Like I mentioned above Seda doesn't take a strong role in this book but there is the occasional scene. And

what does come to show in her is that it takes place after Heirs of the Blade. So I am hoping to see a bit of a catch up for Che's and Thalric's story in the book to follow. But that said. Seda's part is cool, well cooler than cool. Because we all know what the last book in the series is called right? Seal of the Worm. Yes. Now that Seda is struggling with being Inapt, having a heavy weight on her shoulders to lead the Wasps to victory, she is contemplating using deadly magics. And this part really bring the worst in her to front but possibly the best of the series. Adrian Tchiakovsky starts to drop hints about what the Seal of the Worm is. And this is really something that got my hopes up when I read the first word. Especially given the fact that one of Seda's advisers, Gjegvey, is telling her not to and why. But Seda is determined to see her plan for total domination, with no matter what costs. But what makes her character really strong is that Adrian Tchaikovsky shows her on one moment in a very fragile way and on the other moment determined, viscous and harsh. With the first hint of the danger of the Seal of the Worm shown in The Air War starts to give a promise a grande ending.

The overall storyline was solidly constructed from start finish, and even though you are already in the eight book of the series, Adrian Tchaikovsky doesn't falter at all with what he has already shown in his narration in the first seven books. The story doest fall in a drag and he keeps on introducing twists and turns to really get you fired up about the proposed events will unfold. He keeps you on the edge of your seat and sharp about everything, from down to the battles to the relation amongst several characters. The way that the aerial combat is being described is just done in an amazingly rich way, like you were just co-piloting a plane together with Taki and the other aces. Good stuff. The ending of the story, with Collegium having fended of the Empire once again, does leave a direct entry for War Master's Gate, and with this Adrian Tchaikovsky does show that the Empire isn't bested with one loss. They are determined to win, to conquer and to destroy. The Empire is shown in this everpresent, everdetermined dangerous and nefarious way. They will never give up, they will never step down and there is only one solution...

The Air War continues the ever solid tradition of The Shadows of the Apt series. By revisiting earlier proposed idea's and letting them come to full show in The Air War Adrian Tchaikovsky really shows that he is on top of his game with writing Epic Fantasy and knows how to build a series and an interesting and engaging world. The story starts off with a slow exposition of the direction of the story, but when the Storm hits, shows chaos, battles, and much much more. It's like I said with Heirs of the Blade this is a series to read. And this might turn into a fan boy review, well frankly I don't care. It's extraordinary.

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.

Anymore 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.

Louise Potterton says

terrifically detailed world , great characters, keeps you reading!

Jason says

3 Stars

This was one of my most anticipated books of 2012. Adrian Tchaikovsky is one of my favorite authors today, and The Shadows of the Apt series is my favorite series. With the previous books, Tchaikovsky has consistently demonstrated his skills at developing and maintaining a massively epic story line. These are some of the most original fantasy / science fiction / steampunk hybrids one could read. The world building, character development, and depth of the storyline are top notch. The Shadows of the Apt series is simply an epic story that should not be missed.

Taken on its own The Air War is a fast, fun, high flying, and steampunk-esque fantasy read. It works in that it further develops the main story line, the reunification of the Empire of the Wasps, and the power gathering of the Empress. Stenwold is a major focus in this book and that is fine by me as the maker is an amazing man. There are many amazing action scenes that take place in the sky. Air battles, crazy flying, and cool steampunk air machines. This book has a great starting point and climaxes well, which in turn gives it some standalone appeal. There are many points of view, some plot twists, and some future threads revealed.

The problem that I personally had with this novel is that my two favorite characters, and unarguably the series major center, are not in this book at all. This normally would not be an issue for me in any other series, but Che and Thalric are far too magnetic, interesting, and unforgettable to be without. They are two of my very favorite protagonists and their relationship is the heart and soul of this incredible series. At book #8 now, we the reader have too much invested in these two characters to not be given more about them. It is due to these two people that several books in this series have finished atop my favorite of the year.

I cannot emphasize enough as to how serious I am when I say that Fantasy readers should not miss out on this epic series. It ranks among my very favorite and Tchaikovsky has really created something special. Please go out and buy book one and join me in my love for the insect kinden and all that is the Shadows of the Apt series.

Will Sexton says

Great!!

I never cease to be amazed at Adrian's in-depth characterization. The people of his world are the real story. Everything else is interesting but the struggles the characters go through is what keeps you reading.

Blind_guardian says

The Wasp Empire has purged its traitorous governors, and now Empress Seda once again hurls an army of black and gold at the city of Collegium and the rest of the Lowlands. With the help of new flying machines and the artifice of the Iron Glove, the Empire blasts its way to the gates of Collegium, preceded by a new innovation in the Air War that will decide the fate of Collegium itself.

Another exciting and fast-moving chapter in this most delightful of fantasy series, though a number of characters are conspicuous by their absence, specifically Cheerwell Maker. I probably could have done

without the Imperial pilot POV, as I'm constantly rooting for the character whose head I'm riding in to get it shot off so they'll stop killing characters I actually like.

Angrboda says

I enjoyed this somewhat less than the previous two, primarily because it seemed to me to be just one long battle description. I liked Taki when we met her in Solarno the first time, but here her sections tended to be same-same-y air battles. Yes, the title is rather a tip of, but even so. Didn't she do anything else? Ever? Same with Stenwold. He's not really 'on camera' too much and when he is he seems to have mainly become rather bland and characterless. Perhaps a way of showing the psychological effects of the constant Wasp threat and all the losses and what not, but I have to say it made me like him rather less. Rather a lot less, actually.

Paul Nelson says

The Shadows of the Apt series for me is wonderfully unique, truly epic and the remarkable concept of the insect-kindens is a credit to the imagination of the author.

This novel is the start of the final segment of the story and we are introduced to the history of the seal of the worm, the title of the final novel.

For five years there has been peace between the Wasp Empire and its neighbours.

The Wasp Empress Seda has used these first years of her reign to consolidate and strengthen her position by first taking care of business at home, while the artificers have been busy developing new weapons that can cause untold damage on a new scale. Now all is ready and Seda ignites the campaign to enslave the Lowlands with the Air War.

My only disappointment was the fact that Che, Tynisa and Thalric are not in the book.

However for me Seda and what goes on around her steals the book, I wanted to read more of her and the underhand plotting of the Rekef agents to take control of the empire. Seda strives to resurrect the lost magic of the world and the potential here is massive.

There is also the Assassin Bug kinden on a mission who starts to question his loyalties after finding a position close to the Empress and the Mantis guard led by the resurrected Tisamon.

Despite a slow start the battle of Collegium starts around half way through the book and this is where the story really takes off, characters from previous books resurface along with a host of new characters that maintain the interest.

One of the spider clans align with the Wasp invaders and the allies must fight on two fronts in the air over Collegium and against a land invasion.

Overall a good continuation of the story and everything is set up nicely for the last two novels.

Ella says

The most common problem I have with the series is still present here (albeit not as extreme as in previous installments), apart from the occasional "my species doth protest too much" individuals who stray from the norm every person depending on race and Kinden is defined by what they are rather than who they are; every beetle is passive, clumsy and greedy, every wasp has a hair-trigger temper and is misogynistic to boot, every

mantis is nuts, every scorpion a brute, every ant is xenophobic, violent, martial and has no personality so to speak of, every fly will steal anything that's not nailed down, every moth is a creepy luddite, every spider is a total sociopath...actually lets discuss that for a second. They seem to have this "free pass" in the eyes of the rest of the world for being these impossibly clever chess-masters when actually they're all just sociopathic jerks who habitually try to undermine society for shits and giggles...a culture like theirs should never have developed.

The blatant racism and superiority complex every city-state/Kinden/culture has, is supposed to be portrayed as "wrong" but it's technically not racism when every culture does indeed adhere to all the negative stereotypes about them. I'm Irish so I'm guessing if I were a character in Tchaikovsky's works I'd be the freckled, red-headed drunken catholic relief character who only existed to get herself into comic situations because of her own stupidity...and I take exception to that...I'm blonde....but I digress, this writing style makes all the various sides just as bad as each other and frankly I can't bring myself to give a damn about any of them. The only difference between every other culture and the "supreme bad guys" the wasps, as far as I can tell is that the wasps seem to be winning. My tip? Narrow down the number of Kinden you have or stop introducing new ones and give the existing ones some depth. Although at this stage it would take another eight books because of the number of Kinden he's introduced...

Also for a steampunk technologically-advanced world why are they so damn insular? These are people who have invented guns, trains, bombs, steam-engines, submarines and freaking aeroplanes not to mention they have bloody superpowers which is always handy...and yet it's only since the goddamn war that they seem to ever realize that there are people beyond their own borders. Like, the various races are supposed to parallel real-world cultures and yet we were invading and conquering each other like it was going out of style during a time when the height of modern technology was the goddamn compass. It's gotten to the point where the stupidity of every collective race is getting on my nerves, they're all so...dumb...

Stenwold started out as a promising character, a couple of books ago...but now he has become a character of the cliché it looked like he was going to subvert for a while. The man has no dimension to him whatsoever, "enemy of the wasps" is pretty much his defining characteristic, that this guy is considered the smart one in his world is a little worrying. I get that he's lost so much that his anti-wasp crusade has eroded everything that once was Stenwold Maker but we never got to see the optimistic, energetic and naive youth he once was we are only told he was once like this.

Seda got some interesting emotional depth that I wasn't expecting, we learn that she's still ruled by her own fear, or rather her fear of fear itself, her quest for power and taking over the world is not so much rooted in pure greed but rather a desperate almost childlike wish to conquer everything so nothing can ever hurt her again. This made her surprisingly sympathetic, ya know...murderous psychopath thing aside...

Once again most of the characters strike me as supremely selfish. Is this just me? I don't know why but they seem to have little emotional depth or else the author is just bad at creating realistic interactions between characters without it seeming forced. Except Che and Thalric who sadly don't feature...

The book also introduces a new quartet of characters, a young mixed-bag of college students that seem to parallel the original four, although they are infinitely more likable. what can I say, I loved them. I guess I'm a sucker for the underdogs; the original four are to these lot what the cool kids are to the guys playing dungeons and dragons at the lunch-table in the dark corner at the back of the cafeteria. Their friendships seem more genuine, thrust together because they are all on the peripherals of the insular and superior-minded collegium society, as opposed to being an ensemble of clichés including the suave sexy warrior, the handsome mysterious foreigner, the awkward dork who's not actually that awkward and a genius who is constantly overlooked, sorry but their little group seemed so damn...artificial ...they're also older, or at least not explicitly revealed to be goddamned teenagers...Looks like Tchaikovsky is picking up a few tricks after all...I hope they feature prominently in the next books, maybe at the expense of Lazlo? Sorry, the guy just

annoys me...

Also the apt vs. inapt thing, the “one group can do magic one can’t” thing is cool but the complete lack of understanding it’s just...too unbelievable, (and yeah that’s saying a lot about a story set in a steampunk world inhabited by super-powered insect-human hybrids)...it’d be fine if the magicians were hiding behind a masquerade, like say a werewolf in an urban fantasy book, but they go around openly calling themselves magicians and magic clearly exists in this world...if these Kinden really are human they should be able to understand both at least nominally, I have a colleague who works in the lab with me who believes in psychics and her head hasn’t imploded at the sheer paradoxical nature of it yet, coz you know humans are a bundle of contradictions we can believe in all sorts of stupid asynchronous crap. Similarly, an inapt-Kinden should be able to open a bloody door, my dog can open doors, hell, my cat can open doors...find me a moth big enough and I bet I could train it to open doors...but then again I’ve already mentioned how dumb I find most of the characters...

But all those irritating little details which I have come to accept are part of this series aside, they are fun and easy to read, just don’t think about it too hard. The quasi deus ex machina at the end was a bit too contrived for my liking however...

Josh says

‘The Air War’ is the latest look at aviation fantasy in the Shadows of the Apt which comprises all the elements typical of this format from kamikaze characters, fierce air battles, and spiralling suspense at G-Force speed. Tchaikovsky’s first foray into air battle was in ‘Blood of the Mantis’ which tested the turbulence without going to the extremes of full scale warfare across multiple cities as depicted in ‘The Air War’. From Solarno, to Myna, all the way to Collegium, the cities of the Lowlands and environs – no sky is safe as the Wasp initiated war extends its boundaries with devastating results.

Taki and the fly-kindens rise to greater prominence than previous instalments with a number of characters contributing heavily towards the story that previously held minor or no roles. This helped to keep the series fresh and provided a means to expand upon the world building and deep characterisation of those who inhabit the Lowlands and environs. There is a not so subtle nod at the recreation of the successful band of mixed kindens popularised in ‘Empire of Black and Gold’ and ‘Dragonfly Falling’ with Straessa (ant/spider half-breed), Eujen (Bettle), Gerethwy (woodlouse), and Averic (wasp) the new breed of students at Collegium. Despite being new characters, Tchaikovsky does a great job at developing and making the reader care about them. Eujen is probably the most interesting, almost a younger Stenwold-like idealist.

The early battle in Myna is reminiscent of the ferocious land based encounters in ‘Dragonfly Falling’, with the exception being Myna’s battle is a mixture of ground and airborne assault. Tchaikovsky is a master of detailing combat through flawless narrative and picture perfect realism. While Collegium itself is touted as a place of peace and intellectual stimulus yet at its core, it’s politicking threatens to rot its very foundation. In an attempt to maintain a semblance of normalcy amidst times of war by clinging to order and bureaucracy, Stenwold himself undergoes an interesting change of perception.

There are many good things in ‘The Air War’ – the highlights of which are primarily focused on the full frontal warfare and interesting characterisation of key players on both side of the confrontation. I found myself cheering equally for fly-kindens wasp sympathisers (Pingge) just as much as I did Taki and Laszlo. I also liked the reference to ‘Makerist’ as a form of political view. ‘The Air War’ is building towards

something big. Empress Seda, while not playing a large role, does lay the foundation for further interesting plot threads to unfold in future instalments. I cant wait for more. 5 stars

More information about the Shadows of the Apt series can be found at this wiki (which is also mentioned in the acknowledgements section of 'The Air War'). <http://shadowsoftheapt.wikia.com/wiki...>

My review for 'The Sea Watch' (book six) can be found here: <http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

My review for 'Heirs of the Blade' (book seven) can be found here.
<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

Eric says

4 Stars

8 books in and the series is still going strong. The Air War continues to deepen and expand the series while delivering great entertainment.

The war has started again. The conflict built towards in the last few books erupts in The Air War, pitting the Wasps against the Lowlands once more. After being beaten back and forced to settle rebellions within the Empire, the Wasps push west, seeking to take the Lowland cities that have defied them once already.

After 3 books that focused on previously unseen areas in the world the author has created, The Air War brings things back to where it all started. The Lowlands. The plot is fairly straightforward but is executed with great skill. There is significantly more action in this book than in the last several, and Tchaikovsky shows again how well he writes large scale battles. A few scenes toward the end were particularly good.

As he has in the previous books, he also introduces new characters. Several of them were memorable, and I hope to see more of them in the future. We get to see a number of returning characters as well, several of whom are much different than when they were first introduced. In a few cases, those changes see characters move in unexpected directions. I think Tchaikovsky does a fantastic job of showing the human cost of war, not just in the lives lost but the change war brings to those that live through it. I also really enjoy that he continues to introduce characters on both sides of the conflict. It gives a real depth to the events and adds what I think is a realistic and sobering aspect to the war, showing that good and evil people exist on both sides.

Tchaikovsky also continues to show incredible imagination as he portrays the impact of burgeoning technology and how it continues to change the nature of war. There was one moment that seemed a bit convenient but it's fascinating to how the world is being changed by technology innovated for the purpose of combat.

The ending is almost a bit abrupt, leaving readers wondering what is going to happen next. Only 2 books left in the series....

Dominic says

Shadows of the Apt has been one of my favourite series for a number of years now, even if you consider that it's rather more technologically advanced than the fantasy I like to read. The unique insect-kindens and their gripping story were enough to get me sucked in when starting *Empire in Black and Gold*, and once that happened I was hooked even when it began to include snapbrows and orthopters and all the other advances the artificers brought us. *The Air War* is the eighth instalment in the series and while I've never ranked them in order of enjoyment, I'd say this would be in the lower half of the list if I did.

The first half just seemed to drag on without the usual excitement I've come to associate with Adrian Tchaikovsky's writing. Whole chapters seemed filled with text and so little dialogue to break it up. Even with another two books scheduled to complete the series, I struggled my way through the first half of *The Air War* wondering to myself if this was the end of Stenwold Maker's tale as far as I'm concerned.

Fortunately for me, things did pick up after I persevered through those opening chapters, and the second half of the book was back close to the sort of level I expect from this series. Where early battles in the air seemed slow and almost forced, the latter ones took on new life and zipped back and forth across the pages. Where new characters had come in and added nothing, suddenly I cared about them and appreciated their freshness compared to those I'd been reading about for much of the previous seven titles.

One key joy to picking up any *Shadows of the Apt* novel is the introduction of new insect kindens. We've previously seen the moths, butterflies and sea-kindens to name but a few, and these additions can really freshen up a multi-title series. With *The Air War*, we meet assassin-bugs and fireflies coming to the fore. I admit, I didn't fully appreciate the former, but I did like the addition of the little firefly and the opportunity that new kinden presents. I expect to see more of both of these characters, and perhaps some more of their kindens, in the last two books to come.

Of those we've already met, our main characters are Taki, the fly aviatrix who fittingly takes centre stage in a book called *The Air War*; Laszlo, the pirate-turned-spy and of course, Stenwold Maker, the beetle-kindens spymaster and Collegium War Master. Although some personal favourites are missing (Thalric, Che, Tynisa), Taki and Laszlo, plus the addition of Straessa "the antspider" and her group provide a likeable cast on the side of the Collegium forces. One of the things Tchaikovsky does very well with these books is show both sides of the story, and it's great to get inside the heads (literally in some cases) of some of the wasp-kindens antagonists. There's plenty of focus on the wasp empress Seda and her increasingly mystical ways, and the major players of both the wasp army and its aviation corps also feature heavily. The unbiased way this is done is refreshing and allows the reader to view both sides and make up their own mind who to root for.

Although this novel more than any other in the series is a bit too steampunk for my liking, I still have a great fondness for the *Shadows of the Apt* and look forward to finishing the story. So long as the next two titles follow the second half of *The Air War* rather than the style and pace of the first half, it could be a heck of a finale coming up.

Algernon says

This is the eighth book set in the Apt world, so the review is addressed mostly to those already familiar with the story. For the other readers, you should start at the beginning: you'll discover one of the most imaginative and energetic epics currently being published. I have been a fan from the start, and the latest book sits well with the overall quality of the storytelling and the incredible richness of the setting. Briefly, the Apt world is populated by humanoid nations, each borrowing some insect characteristic / aptitude that determines their

place in society and the nature of their culture: Beetles are stocky and industrious, Wasps can fly and sting and are generally violent and impulsive; Bees are hard working, Moths like the shadows and the ancient mysteries; Spiders are treacherous, Flies are small and fast and sociable, and so on for at least another two dozen kinds.

The conflict is basically between the expanding Wasp Empire and the city states alliance around Collegium - center of academic study and technological research. This eighth book is in fact a return to the positions at the start of **Empire of Black and Gold** with the Wasps attacking the city of Sarn and threatening the whole Lowlands. The reboot vibe is accentuated by the introduction of a lot of new characters, including a youthful quartet of student fighters in Collegium echoing the adventures of the original group Cheerwell-Totho-Salma-Tynisa. Also new: a couple of spies on both sides of the conflict, an assassin with conflicted loyalties, a Wasp General and his Spyder counterpart. What has changed in a dramatic way since the first war is the technology, with the focus in this book on airplanes. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and Tchaikovsky has done his research well into the nature of aerial tactics, enough for the book to merit comparisons to the historical events of the Battle for Britain in WWII, while maintaining enough original concepts to avoid being called derivative. I loved the detailed descriptions of dogfights and the book was, as usual, a page turner that after a slower start gained enough momentum in later chapters to become a speeding train without brakes. But, since I mentioned technology, I should also mention that this was the most difficult part for my suspension of disbelief to function. For one thing, progress is much too fast, with about five centuries of military development crammed into a decade of storytelling: from bows and arrows, siege walls and trebuchets, to machine guns (snapbows), heavy tanks (sentinels), large caliber cannons, targeting computers, fighter planes and bomber squadrons. Few of these machines are actually viable: machine guns powered by compressed air, tanks on legs instead of tracks, airplanes with wind-up clockwork engines. In this particular case, I believe the effort for originality led to some hard to swallow engineering features.

The Inapt part of the series worked much better for me, proving that I am curiously more open to magic than to science in my fantasy reading. Although the Inapt chapters are few in this volume, and are focused mostly on the Wasp Empress Seda, the developments look promising for the next books, where I expect the technological overtones of this one to be more balanced with mysteries and hidden powers. I would also like to see a return of some of my favorite characters that have been ignored in favor of concentrating almost exclusively on the airplanes and their pilots.

In general, the author is really good about creating likable characters and controlling a very complex plot, but I have a small gripe about **The Air War** and I can't let it pass. I've noted this problem with other big epics, so it's not particular to the Apt universe, and it's basically about rising the odds against the heroes and piling misfortune after misfortune on them in order to make their victory so much sweeter in the end. Not so much that any character in Shadows of the Apt is immune from injury or death, but when the chances of victory are so slim as to be non-existent, the writer would be forced to pull a 'deus-ex-machina' out of his magic hat, and it sorts of detracts from the credibility already strained by the technological wishful thinking. In this particular case, I didn't mind so much the device (view spoiler) as the poor cloaking of the twist, made rather obvious well in advance of its deployment. What's more, when you already have tens of thousands of deaths in one of the early books of the series, how much more can you raise the stakes? Go for millions? Go for WMD? Go for the ubiquitous end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it cataclysm?

Despite these small critical comments, I really enjoyed the ride, and the Series remains one of my top five fantasy epics. I can't wait for the next one to hit the stores.

Christopher says

The Air War is the eighth book in the Shadows of the Apt and the pace does not let up for a second! :D the focus of the book is back on Stenwold and co again whereas the previous book Heirs of the Blade was focused on Che's gang! :D

The war has kicked off again in a big way with both sides developing even better technology! :D Indeed much of the book is focused around how both sides are engaged in it's deployment and how they both try to offset it! :D This actually leads to a number of scenes where you get to see both sides reporting on how ferocious their opponents when encountering the enemy technology and skills! :D

The characterisation is right on as ever with this series with many of the characters clearly growing in many ways! :D Stenwold is certainly a very ruthless character much to his own shock and Collegiums! :D New characters such as the Antspider are introduced who provide a different perspective on things! :D With the influence of new and old characters moral debates also come to the fore which provides the book with the package of moral dilemmas that total war brings out! :D It shows how the characters to grow as well and who steps in to fill many of the roles is great! :D

The Empress is also very busy researching in her Inapt abilities which are sure to have a much larger focus later in future books! :D The way she calmly deals with General Brugens conspiracy is utterly ruthless and her character is veiled in many mysteries still though her opposite number Che is only mentioned in The Air War a confrontation is no doubt brewing! :D

The pace of The Air War is frenetic and that is reflected throughout with nations and characters throwing their might and abilities around at a terrific pace that never lets up and is bound to continue straight into the next book War Master's Gate! :D

The Air War is brilliant you will be up late page turning to find out what happens and the characters do not pussy foot around with the stakes being so high you will not be able to put it with ease! :D Brilliant and highly recommended! :D Next Please! :D Lol

Liviu says

(aug 3) I read some 100 pages from Air War and besides being the superb book one expected, there are some surprises in so far there are quite a lot of new characters who seem destined for starring roles - a new "tetrad" of special Collegium (more or less as, well, would not want to spoil it but there is a scene that strongly reminds one of how we met the original 4, Che, Tynisa, Totho and Salma...) youngsters, a cool Assassin Bug kinden on a mission, a Wasp kinden spy master with a secret...

The lack of Che, Tynisa and Thalric that I was a little disappointed about, is at least for now more than compensated by the new guys and girls

(aug 5) Finished this last night actually and now rereading it but one can only say wow as Mr. Tchaikovsky manages to keep the series fresh while juggling all the freight from the previous 7 books; Seda just takes over whenever she is on the page and The Seal of the Worm (title of the last book!) makes its quietly menacing appearance while the ending is not unlike the one from Dragonfly, at a good stopping point but with a clear TBC stamped on the last page; next book (War Master's gate) cannot come too soon...

Full review for Tuesday (Aug 7) and I plan to either c/p it here or link it depending on length

A little bit later than planned but the full FBC review is up; as it is long, but in essence it says what i said

above within a lot of context regarding the series, 8th volume and all, just the link here

<http://fantasybookcritic.blogspot.com...>
