



## Art of War

*Petros Triantafyllou (Editor) , Mark Lawrence , Ed Greenwood , Brian Staveley , Miles Cameron , John Gwynne , Sebastien de Castell , Mitchell Hogan , more... Stan Nicholls , Andrew Rowe , C.T. Phipps , Rob J. Hayes , Nicholas Eames , Mazarkis Williams , Ben Galley , Michael R. Fletcher , Graham Austin-King , Ed McDonald , Anna Stephens , Anna Smith Spark , R.J. Barker , Michael R. Miller , Benedict Patrick , Sue Tingey , Dyrk Ashton , Steven Kelliher , Timandra Whitecastle , Laura M. Hughes , J.P. Ashman , M.L. Spencer , Steven Poore , Brandon Draga , D. Thourson Palmer , D.M. Murray , Anne Nicholls , R.B. Watkinson , Charles F. Bond , Ulf Lehmann , Thomas R. Gaskin , Zachary Barnes , Nathan T. Boyce , Brian D. Anderson ...less*

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Charity Anthology: All proceeds going to MSF (Doctors Without Borders).

“War, my friend, is a thing of beauty.”

How do you get forty fantasy authors to contribute short stories for a war-themed anthology without paying them? It sounds as if there should be a good punchline to that, but all Petros Triantafyllou did was twist the moral thumbscrews and tell them all the profits would go to Doctors Without Borders, a charity that works tirelessly across the world to alleviate the effects of conflict, sickness and poverty.

So, with clear consciences, several busloads of excellent and acclaimed fantasy authors have applied themselves to the task of penning a veritable mountain of words on the subject of The Art of War, expect bloodshed, gore, pathos, insight, passion, and laughs. Maybe even a wombat. Who knows. Anyway, as the original blurb said: “It’s good. Buy it.”

-Mark Lawrence

Featuring: Mark Lawrence, Ed Greenwood, Brian Staveley, Miles Cameron, John Gwynne, Sebastien De Castell, Mitchell Hogan, Stan Nicholls, Andrew Rowe, C.T. Phipps, Rob J. Hayes, Nicholas Eames, Mazarkis Williams, Ben Galley, Michael R. Fletcher, Graham Austin-King, Ed McDonald, Anna Stephens, Anna Smith Spark, RJ Barker, Michael R. Miller, Benedict Patrick, Sue Tingey, Dyrk Ashton, Steven Kelliher, Timandra Whitecastle, Laura M Hughes, J.P. Ashman, M.L. Spencer, Steven Poore, Brandon Draga, D. Thourson Palmer, D.M. Murray, Anne Nicholls, R.B. Watkinson, Charles F Bond, Ulf Lehmann, Thomas R. Gaskin, Zachary Barnes & Nathan Boyce.

Foreword by Brian D. Anderson

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# From Reader Review Art of War for online ebook

**Melanie says**

*ARC provided by my beautiful future wife, Mary, in exchange for an honest review!*

This anthology holds 40 short stories by some really amazing high fantasy authors. And on top of this being a really impressive writing group, all proceeds for this book will go to Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders! MSF is an international humanitarian non-governmental organization that is known for their help in war-torn regions and developing countries affected by endemic diseases. I couldn't help but preorder, even though I was given an ARC, and I hope you do the same if you are able to! More information about this amazing charity here!

I'm giving this collection five stars overall. From Greek Gods to newly summoned demons. From healers on the backlines to the warriors on the frontlines. From Spider Gods to Magpie Kings. Not only do I love some of these authors and their stories, I think this collection will make many fantasy readers very happy. Plus, the cause and charity for this anthology are both so damn important and for those two things alone this anthology deserves five stars. Thank you so much for putting this together, Petros. From my entire heart and soul, thank you.

But, whenever I review anthologies I review every story. So, I'm going to break down each short story with my thoughts, opinions, and individual star rating!

## ► **The Breaking of the Sky by Ed McDonald** - ★★

I really enjoyed *Blackwing* when I read it last year, so it was really nice being back in this world. Well, maybe "nice" isn't the word I'd use, since the people in this world are having a pretty hard time to say the least. War is coming, and we follow a man and his companions who have been transporting a mysterious box. I just really disliked the constant commentary, within this very short story, about how one of main character's companions did terrible things to dogs. Also, the main character kind of has a gross outlook on women in general. Not the strongest start for this anthology, but overall, I do enjoy this world and it made me excited to read *Ravencry* this year!

## ► **The Last Arrow by Mitchell Hogan** - ★★

This short is about a farmer that was drafted into a squad of archers, who are protecting a wall from sorcerers. They have been on duty for fifty-three days, living in terrible conditions, barely being fed, and basically being treated awful. This story is sad, and depressing, yet leaves you rather invested to see where it is going. I didn't love this one, but it was intense to read.

## ► **Dear Menelaus by Laura M. Hughes** - ★★★★★

Holy moly, this one was so damn perfect! Absolutely glorious! This is a letter that a woman is writing to her husband, which you can probably guess from the title, deals heavily with Greek heroes. But this is such an amazing feministic approach, and I loved every single perfectly contrasted and powerful sentence. And if you know who Menelaus' wife was, well, the story will only be even that much more enjoyable. I loved this with my whole heart.

## ► **Warborn by C.T. Phipps** - ★★

This one is about a demon who wakes up inside a summoning circle, in front of a nineteen-year-old girl who

desperately needs to kill her parents. And apparently, in this world, the only way to give payment for help after summoning is your soul, blood, or sex. And, of course the demon picks sex. We also get to see that the demon wasn't the best human when he was one. I don't know, this had some decent twists and turns, but it mostly left me with a bad taste in my mouth.

► **This War of Ours by Timandra Whitecastle** - ★★★★★

Wow, I loved this more than words. Beautiful, heart wrenching, powerful, perfection. And.... KOBOLDS! And magic, and family, and war, and stealthy missions, and required silence. Like, is this a full-length series? A story set in this world? Give me it all. This was wonderful. I loved Sparrow and bug and I need so much more.

► **Shadows in the Mist by Sue Tingey** - ★★

This had a huge horror vibe to it, which isn't really my cup of tea. It was a little gratuitous with the gore and descriptions, which is also something I'm not a huge fan of. Also, this has a very eerie vibe, but the overall story just felt kind of pointless, and it left a lot to be desired.

► **The Art: Post War by RJ Barker** - ★★★

The only ARC of 2017 that I requested and didn't get to was *Age of Assassins*, and now I feel even worse! This was so intriguing, and dark, and funny, and I loved it. It is also told in second person, and just felt so unique among the other stories in this collection. I really enjoyed reading this, and I can't wait to finally read more by RJ Barker.

► **The Fox and the Bowman by Sebastien de Castell** - ★★★★★

Sebastien is not only the master of writing, he is also the master of plotting, and this short story is so expertly crafted. This is a story about revenge, and how all-consuming it can be. This is a story about how one's life can change dramatically over the smallest of choices. This is about family, and what we are willing to do to keep our loved ones safe. And honestly? This is such a fun story about magic and perspective. I loved it. Masterpiece just like everything else Sebastien writes.

► **Arrow's Wrath by Charles F. Bond** - ★★★

This is another story of revenge involving an archer, and this was actually able to evoke a lot of emotions from me. I will say that this got very graphic with the violence during the revenge mission, where the description felt so damn real. But this is about a group of five men on a couple different missions in the name of vengeance, but I just felt like too much was packed into this short story, even though I did enjoy reading it.

► **Hard Lessons by Michael R. Miller** - ★★★★★

I read and loved *The Reborn King* in 2017, so I was so excited to see that his short story was set in the same world! And good lord, my entire body got goosebumps when I read Darnuir's name. I loved this so much, and it was nothing short of amazing to be back in this world.

► **A Battle for Elucame: Leah by R.B. Watkinson** - ★

This is a story of a young girl, who is currently a slave, and has made it her mission to kill one of the priests where she is being held, because he did something terrible to her once before. The priests are terrible people, and there are a lot of hints of them being rapists, on top of them being general abusers, and this just felt bad to read. It didn't feel dark or emotional, it felt forced and for shock value, and it wasn't fun to read.

► **The Revolution Changed Everyone by D. Thourson Palmer** - ★

This is about a healer that is hiding their past, when a person is being treated for very bad wounds that must

have come from a large animal in this jungle or something else. This just felt too obvious for me, so the twist wasn't impactful in the slightest. But I can totally see others enjoying this one more than I did.

► **Misplaced Heroism by Andrew Rowe** - ★★★★★

Oh my gosh, I was so happy when this story started out in our present-day time, and the main protagonist is just browsing Reddit. This was such a much-needed change up in setting, and I loved it. Even though he does get whisked away to another world rather quickly, so that he can defeat a demon king and his army! This felt like I fell into a MMORPG, or a well-along D&D campaign, with all the amazing strategizing. This was so funny, and surprising, and just freakin' wonderful in every aspect! I loved this story, completely and whole heartedly.

► **Violet by Mazarkis Williams** - ★★

This is a story about a young girl whose parents shelter a traveler, but once the traveler leaves the young girl, she feels like he has taken a part of her with him. Therefore, she sells things she shouldn't, and goes places she shouldn't, and probably ruins her life looking for him, while losing things that meant a lot to her. This was well written, I just never enjoyed the actual story.

► **The Two Faces of War by Rob J. Hayes** - ★★★

This story for sure shows us the terrible side of war, and seeing a healer treat the wounds of the soldiers. Missing arrowheads, spider infestation, it is all here, even if it's not the most pleasant thing to read. Yet, we also get to see the warrior's side of war. But both sides make us question: is it really worth it? This wasn't my favorite story in the collection, but it did merge and move very smoothly and was an enjoyable read.

► **Grannit by JP Ashman** - ★★★

This is exactly the type of enjoyable story I was looking for within this collection. Short and sweet and about a wealthy knight and young boy going to war and the writing made for a really easy but enjoyable story. I for sure want to check out more from this author now.

► **Asalantir Forever by Steven Poore** - ★★★

This story centers around a crazy and bloody little battle that's going down. I feel like this might even deserve more than three stars, because this is the first story in the collection that has left me feeling satisfied with a battle. Also, I became very attached to Jin and her Pride. This story also makes me really want to look into the rest of the author's backlist.

► **Tower of the Last by Steven Kelliher** - ★★★

I read *Valley of Embers* by this author last year, and I really enjoyed it and his writing style! And this mini tale was no different. This is a short story that surrounds a boy, fighting his way up a tower. And when he finally ascends, he is in for quite the surprise. This is tale filled with fables, mystery, and magic, and I need more.

► **The Waving of the Flag by Thomas R. Gaskin** - ★★★★★

This story has a beautiful juxtaposition of war. We get to see present day, upon a great defeat, and constant flashbacks from four years ago, when our main character is enlisting. Wars are won, and wars are lost, even though it is hard to see when you are on the winning side, but regardless of winning or losing, there is always a price to pay. War costs something every single time, on every single side. I was actually very emotional while reading this one, and had tears streaming down my face most the time. I feel like I almost had a cathartic experience upon finishing. War takes so much, and it will always take so much. In fantasy, or in our world in 2018. This one is truly beautifully crafted and I will carry this story in my heart for a long time.

► **The Art of War by Brian Staveley** - ★★★★★

This was moving, intense, equal parts heart wrenching and heartwarming, this was outstanding. And as someone who loves Brian Staveley's *Chronicle of the Unhewn Throne*, this was also a damn joy to read. In this story we get to see a man struggle, or have success, with the god of war living inside him. But if you're a fan of the series, seeing General Dakesh and his life was a treat above any others. Again, I know I'm biased because I love this world and series so much, but that ending was so perfect and meant so much to me. Perfection. A masterpiece. My eyes, heart, and soul, feel so blessed.

► **Hero of the Day by Nathan T. Boyce** - ★★

This story stars a young man determined to prove his bloodline, after the death of his mother. This tale for sure centers around a theme of who gets to be the heroes in the story, regardless of the actions that we don't normally get to see. And I really appreciated that this was a different and very grey tale, but I just didn't love this one, despite its uniqueness.

► **Sacred Semantics by Nicholas Eames** - ★★★★★

Like, I do not want to be picturing different kinds of spiders, people warring with one another, shooting mandible guns, being in spider tanks. Seriously, this was one of the most frightening things I've ever read in my entire life. But this was also so smart, so unique, and bloody brilliant. Nicholas Eames humor seeps through onto every page, and only he could make me laugh, while also being terrified at these spider worshipers. Also, this story is super powerful, and holds a very important discussion about war and the things all creatures are willing to do in the name of it. And the ending was beyond words perfect.

► **The War God's Axe by Anne Nicholls** - ★★

This one was a pretty good story about a misfit rising up, but this story uses the world cr\*ppl to describe the main character, who is the only one with the information to save the city from war. I know many people will say "its because of the time and because it's fantasy, and someone not so great said it!" but no, its ableist and hurtful to a lot of people. It sadly really hurt the story for me, regardless of the ending.

► **The Feather and the Paw by Benedict Patrick** - ★★★★★

This was such a good story about a world where the animals of the forest had the ability to speak, and they just found out about humans and a ruling king that has appeared. And besides all of this, a Magpie King has also appeared to cause the Lionfolk some trouble. This felt like a dark fairytale, and it was so different than anything else in this collection. I really, really enjoyed this one and I'm looking forward to reading more from this author in the future.

► **Until the Light has Faded by Graham Austin-King** - ★★★

You all know I'm going to be a little biased, because this story involved a fae army. Even if our main characters are fleeing said fae army! I just feel like this needed to be a part of a longer story, or a bigger world, and maybe it is, but it just felt not enough for a short story collection. Yet, I still enjoyed it!

► **Under the Queen's Throne by Ed Greenwood** - ★★

Oh my gosh, I feel so bad, because I wish this one was more separated from Benedict Patrick's story, since they both have the animal kingdom fairytale feel, but I just didn't like this one as much. Especially because of the shift in story. Again, I really wish these two stories weren't so close together in this anthology.

► **Good Steel by Zachary Barnes** - ★★★

This was so unique, and I really enjoyed it. We get to see a piece of steel "being born" and made into a weapon fit for war. Again, I've never read anything like this before, and it really shined and stood out from the rest of the short stories in this anthology. Very well done.

► **The Cost of Power by Ulf Lehmann** - ★★★

This is a story about a man desperately wanting to save his people. This is a story about how we expect people to lay down their lives to protect their rulers, but the rulers could care less about them being fed and cared for. There is a big discussion on the value of a human life, and overall this was just a really heartwarming story that I really enjoyed reading. But... I want more.

► **The Undying Lands by Michael R. Fletcher's Doppels** - ★★★★★

I loved this one. This stars a girl, that killed a man in a tavern for touching her inappropriately, but the man turned out to be someone important. So, now she's waiting to decide her fate in a coliseum. If you kill ten people, you are free to go, but sadly the opponent she is up against has just killed nine. If he kills her, he is a free man. Also, the dead walk among the living in this world, and it just adds an additional cool layer. I loved this, I was instantly captivated and immersed in this, and I want more.

► **The Fall of Tereen by Anna Smith-Spark** - ★

I very much didn't get along with this author's writing style, therefore I very much feel like it hindered my experience. It reminds me of modern day poetry, which I also find myself not able to get into. So, take this mini review with a grain of salt, but I really didn't enjoy this one.

► **Valkyrie Rain by Dyrk Ashton** - ★★★★★

Okay, this one was awesome! Give me all the Norse mythology! This stars Pruor, Valkyrie of Asgard, daughter of goddess Sif and god Thor, descendant of Odin. And this takes place during Ragnarok. Ahhhh, this was glorious! This is about war, and forgiveness, and paths set for us beyond our control. I loved this.

► **Chattels by Stan Nicholls** - ★★

This was just too much information packed into such a short tale. I know the beginning was meant to fill in some of the blanks, but my mind just couldn't process everything, especially among so many other short stories. I think I would have enjoyed this much more if I was familiar with the author's previous work(s) and world(s).

► **The Storm by Miles Cameron** - ★★★★★

This was one of the longer stories in this collection, but it was very well executed. We get to see an army's leader try to decide how to save the lives of his men when they are at an impasse because they need to get close enough to breach the wall. This was wonderfully written, and I loved this world so much. I honestly wish I could get a full-length novel.

► **Shortblade by Brandon Draga** - ★★★★★

I loved this one, because it was such a bright, shining light in this anthology. It's light, and funny, and warm, and happy, and the ending was so very nice to read. I'm sure not everyone will enjoy such a sweet tale, but I freakin' loved it. Pure joy and happiness and has such an important message!

► **Rendered Chaos by D. M. Murray** - ★

This just... started badly for me. When a dude wakes up during a sex dream, to him humping his cot, Lord, please no. This is just crudely written, and really not for me. I found the humor immature and the conversations awful to read. I totally understand the main character was supposed to be unlikable, but I just couldn't stand to read about him, and I didn't care about the twist.

► **The Best and Bravest by M.L. Spencer** - ★★★

This story is about a squire who works for his father, and a war between two ancient houses is about to begin. We get to see the dead watching over the events, but I found myself confused through most of this.



But the ending was very enjoyable and fulfilling.

► **Exhibition by Ben Galley** - ★★★★★

I really enjoyed this one, because it was so unique. It showcased an artist trying to create while an ugly war is unfolding all around them. Ben has such a wonderful prose, and I loved being on this unique journey that did a wonderful job incorporating the title of this anthology, with an entirely different meaning.

► **Flesh and Coin by Anna Stephens** - ★★★★★

Full disclosure: I love Anna, I love her characters, I love her worlds, and I love her perfect writing. I knew from the first paragraph that this story would be no different. Our main character, Stoneheart, is a cutthroat mercenary that has a problem trusting people. She and her crew are lying in wait, and it is all fun and games until her arch nemesis shows up, proving why she has trust issues. Anna Stephens was meant to write, and I loved this story so very much, even though (like always) she rips out my heart.

► **The Hero of Aral Pass by Mark Lawrence** - ★★★★★

What a way to close an anthology. Perfection. Mark Lawrence is such a smart and witty writer, and this story made me giggle quite often. This was my first time being introduced to Prince Jalan Kendeth, but I can safely say I am nothing but excited to read more. Also, this ending was truly perfect. I wish nothing more than to be able to see what tomorrow brings.

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**Nicholas Eames says**

I'm in this! Along with 39 other talented authors. I've read a lot of these stories and they've all been terrific. Also, the proceeds go to Doctors Without Borders, so I highly recommend taking the plunge.

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**Petros Triantafyllou says**

WINNER OF THE "BEST ANTHOLOGY FOR 2018" AWARD IN THE REDDIT/R/FANTASY 'STABBY' AWARDS!

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**Mark Lawrence says**

I have a story about Jalan Kendeth in this! Worth the price of admission on its own it is!

Also all profits go charity (Doctors Without Borders).

Check out the author list. There are 39 other short stories on the theme of war, and many fine authors involved.

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## **James Lafayette Tivendale says**

I received a review copy of Art of War: Anthology for Charity in exchange for an honest review. I'd like to thank Petros Triantafyllou for this opportunity but also for his amazing efforts in putting this exquisite anthology together. All the proceeds will go to Medecins San Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders). Having already compiled 40 of the finest fantasy authors currently writing, John Anthony Di Giovanni and Shawn King, arguably the best cover artists around also contribute. The editing is by Tim Marquitz and Petros himself and the internal artwork by Jason Deem is beautiful. I was excited to receive this anthology and couldn't wait to get started. Note:- I was a proofreader of ML Spencer's story but this has not influenced my review at all.

Before reading Art of War: Anthology for Charity I knew 28 of the authors and approximately a third of these stories are from their already crafted fantasy worlds. Knowledge of these stories could be beneficial however it only adds approximately an extra 10% enjoyment. For example, Ed McDonald's The Breaking of the Sky is set before the events of Blackwing and John Gwynne's The Greatest Battle is set 7 years after the conclusion of Wrath. They all standalone if you're new to the individual authors and they are still highly engaging. The anthology seems a perfect mix of famous names intertwined with top quality independent authors whose output is often just as credible and enjoyable.

Out of the 40 stories, the following 10 truly stood out to me. It has been difficult to limit it to that number. In no order, my favourites were...

Anna Stephens - Flesh and Coin. Anna proves why she is one of the finest grimdark writers around. Expertly unpredictable, brutal, exciting, and intoxicating.

Mark Lawrence - The Hero of Aral Pass. Jalan, after the events of the Red Queen's War talking about his legendary antics at Aral Pass. The Red Queen's War is one of my favourite fantasy series and this story doesn't disappoint. This is worth buying the book for in isolation.

Andrew Rowe - Misplaced Heroism. Bite-size LitRPG tale. It's startling how deep a magic system Rowe created in these few pages. A gentleman who is scrolling through Reddit gets sucked into a world-defining yet slightly comical battle of the ages. This story portrays amazing wit, and enthusiasm, whilst being pleasantly complex.

Thomas R. Gaskin - The Waving of the Flag. This was a pleasant surprise. I'd not heard of the author yet this story is the one I keep going back to re-read. Amazingly well written, very emotional, quite gritty, and essentially it's just a very good brief narrative.

Michael R. Fletcher's Doppels - The Undying Lands. Fletcher, or his Doppels, are the masters of madness. He's grimdark royalty for a reason and this tale of severed heads, gladiatory battles, and poisoned lands has a sinister comic flavour.

Dyrk Ashton - Valkyrie Rain. Dyrk's a walking mythological encyclopedia. Everything he writes highlights the many hours he's put into research and that obtained knowledge and influence leaks from the page. Valkyrie Rain depicts a battle of the most epic proportions at Valhalla. Dyrk's one of the finest self-published authors around.

Sebastien De Castell - The Fox and The Bowman. This is probably one of the finest short stories I've ever

read. From afar and for vengeance, a young gentleman wants to shoot an arrow through the heart of a Knight who has previously wronged his family. A mysterious stranger approaches and talks to him about the whole scenario. It's a simple sounding premise yet this story has depth and quality not normally associated with tales of this length. It's loosely based on history from French/English wars around the 14th century and the following generations.

ML Spencer - The Bravest and the Best. This story is about an argument between houses, a battle is on the horizon yet when it happens, the Dead are watching. Haunting and poetic, perhaps confusing for parts but this reflects what's going through the young protagonist's mind. It has an excellent finale that will leave people wanting more.

Benedict Patrick - The Feather and the Paw. The King of the Lions decides to invade neighbouring kingdoms but to achieve this his army has to venture through a forest. Unfortunately, the forest inhabitants do not wish to be disturbed. Patrick writes perfect, intoxicatingly haunting short stories.

Nicholas Eames - Sacred Semantics. This tale is about a spider war. 8-legged verses 6-legged variations. This story was dark, emotional, had moments of clarity and a brief potential love angle, but war is hell. There is also a giant spider tank! This story shows Eames' tongue in cheek humour and I'm sure he'll find many new fans from this.

Other notable mentions for quality stories go to Laura M Hughes, Brian Stavely, Ed McDonald, DM Murray, Michael R. Miller, JP Ashman, Rob Hayes, Timandra Whitecastle, and John Gwynne.

Out of 40 stories with the setting being war it's guaranteed some of them are going to be similar. Perhaps if this was limited to 20 stories it could have been even more enjoyable, however, if I personally wasn't engaged by, or didn't enjoy a certain tale that isn't to say it will not be someone else's favourite. Arguably it could have been streamlined yet, I'd have given this book 4 or 5 stars after only reading 20 of the stories, therefore, it would be unfair to penalise this anthology for presenting me with more stories for the same value. This could be the finest fantasy anthology around and I believe it will be a long time before I see one that is as complete, well-produced and brimming with as many quality tales. Petros deserves a lot of credit for what he has composed with Art of War: Anthology for Charity.

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## **Petrik says**

*ARC provided by the editor in exchange for an honest review*

**Art of War: Anthology for Charity is an anthology that deserves your attention.**

Full disclosure first: I am one of the reviewers for Booknest.eu, and although this is an anthology produced by Booknest.eu, I played almost no part in the production of this anthology. I will do what I can and what I always do, and that is to offer my fully honest spoiler-free review on this anthology. Please do note that although I know Petros personally and am a reviewer on Booknest, my review, as always, will be completely unbiased. I won't get into tons of detail on this but I very strongly believe that the moment a reviewer sucking up in their reviews--because maybe they want to get on the author's good side, or they know the author personally, or maybe they are even looking for sponsorship,—is the moment their reviews lose their credibility to me. Bloggers, reviewers, and booktubers, trust me when I say that your audience knows when you're being dishonest in your reviews. If I should be branded as an asshole for being honest with my

reviews, then I'll gladly accept that title. That said, as unbiased as I am, I believe that if I must give a rating, this anthology deserves at least a 4 out of 5 stars because of its content, production value, and of course, its humanitarian intention. Let's get on with the review of the book.

For those of you who don't know, Booknest raised \$4400 last year for MSF (Doctors without Borders), a charity that works tirelessly across the world to alleviate the effects of conflict, sickness, and poverty. Same as last year, Booknest has decided to do another charity project with all the net sales of this anthology going to MSF and that's basically how this anthology was conceived. Knowing about the intention of this project, 40 authors have contributed their short stories, and Jason Deem provided 40 interior artworks (available only in the Paperback edition) for each respective story. Along with Shawn T. King with the typography and John Anthony Di Giovanni with its cover art, all of these authors and artists came together in order to make this anthology happen. The foreword, beautifully written by Brian D. Anderson, not only immediately set the tone regarding what kind of stories you'll get to read here, it also explained why buying this anthology for charity will be beneficial across the world.

“Real war creates poverty, hunger, and disease on a massive scale. Ravaged towns and shattered lives are left in its wake. When this humanitarian crisis arises, who is there to care for those who have had everything stripped away? It is the doctors, the nurses, the volunteers willing to risk their lives to lend a hand. They walk bravely into the heart of danger bearing no weapon or any protection to speak of. And why? Because they know that they are needed.”

I won't be doing a full review of each story, since there are 40 stories here and in my opinion it will be super ineffective to review all of them within one review. Plus, I highly doubt most readers would actually read reviews for 40 short stories in a single post; I know I won't. I will instead provide small reviews of 5 stories which I think were the best out of this anthology.

### **Favorite stories from the anthology:**

#### **-The Greatest Battle by John Gwynne**

There's no doubt that this one will be my favorite story out of this anthology. I strongly recommend you to read this one only after you've finished reading *Wrath*, the last book in Gwynne's masterwork series, the *Faithful and the Fallen*, due to the fact that this is a short epilogue to the series that took place 7 years after the end of *Wrath*. The story features one great skirmish battle and a heartwarming scene with some of our favorite characters from the series. No more explanation is needed, and any fans of the series will definitely love this short story.

#### **-Dear Menelaus by Laura M. Hughes**

**Picture: Interior artwork to *Dear Menelaus*. Artwork by Jason Deem**

I seriously have strong praises for this one. It's the shortest story in the anthology but it was one of the most evocative, thought-provoking, emotional and powerful story about war and what it means that I've read. In less than 10 pages, Laura has created a main character with a realistic background, explaining why the

character made her decisions, and it was wonderfully thought-provoking. Definitely one of the best short stories here. I stated in my review of Laura's 'Danse Macabre' novella that she really needs to write more and I still stand by this statement because I simply love her prose. (Also, on an unrelated note, she draws fantastic doodles; how about that for talented?)

“You say glory, necessity, pride; I say barbarity, greed, arrogance. War is a search for glory, for that particular sense of joy and satisfaction that comes from staking one's life on the outcome of a gamble. The search for a cheap thrill, with a cost too dear for Midas, and on a pretext that, more or less, amounts to 'My neighbour has a thing. I want it.'”

### **-The Undying Lands by Michael R. Fletcher**

I don't think I need to say a lot on this one. It's Michael R. Fletcher, and the grimdark stories that come out of his head are all stories that fans of the genre should read. Honestly, if you claim to love grimdark and haven't given his works a try, you're missing out on a LOT.

### **-Valkyrie Rain by Dyrk Ashton**

**Picture: Interior artwork to *Valkyrie Rain*. Artwork by Jason Deem.**

Taking place in the same world as the author's main series, Paternus, Valkyrie Rain is an incredible short story about a Valkyrie in the midst of Ragnarok. The Valkyrie Rain scene reminds me a bit of the brilliant Iron Rain scene from Pierce Brown's Red Rising trilogy. Considering that I'm also a sucker for mythologies and the fact that Norse myths are one of my favorite mythologies of all time, it shouldn't come as a surprise that this short story became one of my favorite stories from this anthology.

### **-The Hero of Aral Pass by Mark Lawrence**

An epilogue to Wheel of Osheim, Mark Lawrence closes this anthology wonderfully with a brand new short epilogue to his Red Queen's War trilogy. I couldn't ask for a better way to close this anthology and I think any fans of the trilogy will definitely enjoy reading through this one. This excerpt alone in my opinion shows why it was an apt final story for the anthology:

“War is a red haze punctuated by horror and death. It's a sequence of things that no human should ever have to know are possible, let alone see or have happen to them. War is neither a science or an art, it's a fucking mess, and the only sane response to it is to run fast in the opposite direction.”

These are the 5 stories that in my opinion can be considered the best; all the other stories vary from "doesn't work at all" to great. This is also why anthologies will most likely never receive a full 5 out of 5 stars rating

from me because I reserved that score only for books which I absolutely love cover to cover. Now that it's all said and done, overall I love this anthology but honestly speaking, whether I love the content of this book shouldn't even matter that much in the first place. The fact that you're helping the world by buying a book should be reason enough for you to buy this book. If somehow the book sucks for you, don't feel too bad about it, because at least you'll know your money will be put to good use. God knows how many books I wish I could return for my money and time back.

Although we as readers love war stories and look forward to reading them, war, in reality, is not a beautiful thing: compassion is. War is ravaging and it is one of the things that we as human beings must strive to avoid. I have faced several difficulties throughout my whole life but I have never been devastated by massive scale war like WW II, and I won't even try to claim to understand the real horror it could cause. I have, however, lived through the May 1998 riots of Indonesia which resulted in the deaths of 1000+ people and the rapes of 168 women. Back then, I was only 9 years old and I have seen blood and human bodies filled the street where I walked, I have seen women raped just because they were Chinese while I was running through the street crying with my family looking for safe haven, and I can tell you with temerity that war, my friend, is not a thing of beauty. From this event alone, I truly understand that war is without a doubt one the most destructive and vile actions that humanity has inflicted upon one another and the state of the world.

**Art of War: Anthology for Charity is a great anthology, it may not be the absolute best anthology out there in the market, but it's the one that truly deserves your attention.** It's time to show the world that we, readers who have lived a thousand fictional lives, will now do what we can to help the real state of the world by doing what we do best, buying, reading, and spreading words about books such as this one.

**You can order the book [HERE](#)**

*You can find the rest of my Adult Epic/High Fantasy & Sci-Fi reviews at **BookNest***

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## **Jon Adams says**

I'm honored to have received this ARC. Thank you Dyrk!

I would say the odds of having an average rating of 4.175 out of 40 stories in one anthology are slim. But, that's what happened with The Art of War. I've read numerous anthologies and never come across one with this many 5 star stories. And, it's all for charity! Unbeatable.

I don't see how I could possibly review all 40 stories, but below I will list those that I felt earned 5 stars, in book order:

The Breaking of the Sky- Ed McDonald - 5

The Last Arrow- Mitchell Hogan - 5

The Greatest Battle - John Gwynne - 5

The Art: Post War - RJ Barker - 5

The Fox and the Bowman - Sebastien de Castell - 5

Arrow's Wrath - Charles F. Bond - 5

The Waving of the Flag - Thomas R. Gaskin - 5

The Art of War - Brian Staveley - 5

Sacred Semantics - Nicholas Eames - 5

The Undying Lands – Michael R. Fletcher's Doppels - 5  
Valkyrie Rain - Dyrk Ashton - 5  
The Storm - Miles Cameron - 5  
Rendered Chaos - D. M. Murray - 5  
Exhibition - Ben Galley - 5  
Flesh and Coin - Anna Stephens - 5  
The Hero of Aral Pass - Mark Lawrence - 5

And, the 4 star stories:

Dear Menelaus - Laura M. Hughes - 4  
Warborn - C.T. Phipps - 4  
Shadows in the Mist - Sue Tingey - 4.5  
Hard Lessons - Michael R. Miller - 4  
A Battle for Elucame: Leah – R.B. Watkinson - 4  
Misplaced Heroism - Andrew Rowe - 4  
Violet - Mazarkis Williams - 4  
The Two Faces of War - Rob J. Hayes - 4  
Grannit – J.P. AShman - 4  
Until the Light had Faded – Graham Austin-King - 4  
Good Steel - Zachary Barnes - 4  
The Cost of Power - Ulf Lehmann - 4  
The Fall of Tereen - Anna Smith-Spark - 4  
Shortblade – Brandon Draga - 4  
The Best and Bravest - M.L. Spencer - 4

Highly recommended.

The paperback is out now and it's wonderful. Each story has unique art for a header!

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## **Anton says**

The lineup of authors is amazing! I could only wish that editors would include K.J. Parker and Richard Nell and I would be a happy man :)

A broad and diverse collection of circa 40 short stories. Perfect fantasy fiction 'tasting menu' or an opportunity to savour more stories from the authors you already love. I also specifically want to commend the charitable nature of this project and its fantastic execution. For this alone - it deserves 5\*.

My personal favourites are (in the order of appearance):

- > Dear Menelaus by Laura M. Hughes
- > The Fox and the Bowman by Sebastien de Castell
- > Misplaced Heroism by Andrew Rowe
- > The Two Faces of War by Rob J. Hayes
- > The Art of War by Brian Staveley
- > Sacred Semantics by Nicholas Eames

- > The Undying Lands by Michael R. Fletcher
- > The Fall of Tereen by Anna Smith-Spark
- > The Storm by Miles Cameron
- > The Hero of Aral Pass by Mark Lawrence

These guys and gals brought their A-game to this anthology. And if you are not familiar with their long-form writing -you really should mend errors of your ways. And pronto.

Also, if you enjoyed this, you might also want to check out: Evil is a Matter of Perspective: An Anthology of Antagonists and vice versa.

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## **Richard Nell says**

### **Overall/tl;dr**

A dark, wonderful fantasy anthology with a mix of newer and established authors. If you read this and don't end up with several books on your TBR pile, I'll send you your money back. OK that's a lie, I'm very cheap, and actually the proceeds here are for charity so you really shouldn't have asked, you monster.

### **A note on my reading bias.**

I've read almost none of these authors with the exception of M.L. Spencer (1 of her books), and Mark Lawrence (erm, mostly, all of them...). So I went in pretty blank and objective, and actually Spencer made my top 5 without me realizing it (I'd forgotten who the author of the story was until I went back). So, I completely admit unfair Lawrence bias, and nothing else!

\*Edit - I've realized I also read one of Brian Staveley's books, but I'd completely forgotten this as I read.

**My top five favorites** (thanks to Petrik at BookNest for the inspiration! Also your choices are slightly wrong! Eternal war between us is on!)

#### 5. The Art of War - Brian Staveley

Not much to say here. Clever story-telling, very interesting character, well-written. I wanted more. Also I just remembered in this moment I've read the first book in Mr. Staveley's Unhewn Throne series and wasn't hugely keen to continue. I might change my mind about that...

#### 4. The Best and Bravest - M.L. Spencer

The world-building got me here, and I wanted to know more, damnit. The second I felt this way and the story ended, I narrowed my eyes and did the only thing a reader can do in such situations. I admitted defeat. You got me.

#### 3. The Breaking of the Sky - Ed McDonald

Dark, clever, well-written. Actually the only problem with this story is that it was first and took like 10 more stories to find something I liked as much. This bogged me down a little. Thanks a lot, Ed.

#### 2. Exhibition - Ben Galley

Whether this story is simply Mr. Galley's style, or inspired by opioids, it's trippy as hell. And frankly I loved it. I don't think I can tell you what happened or why it happened, but you know what? I don't care. This fellow can write. I'll be looking for more.



#### 1. The Hero of Aral Pass - Mark Lawrence

Ah, Mr. Lawrence. Maybe to actually add *some value* here I'll just say this story is very amusing and clever, and not only finished the anthology well, but in a pleasant way. War is a dark subject, but ultimately - no matter the darkness of life - all one can do is have a sense of humour.

#### **On War and darkness**

I expect I'll blog about this elsewhere, but I just wanted to add for anyone thinking they'd rather not read about war and suffering for several hundred pages - every now and then, you really should. We all have problems. We all read the daily depression of the news. But stories like these can help remind us that life is very capable of being more terrible than we can imagine. That the technology and peace forged by the blood and sweat of our ancestors need not last forever. So cherish it. Protect it. Evil and darkness exists in this world, and to appreciate our lives in contrast, every now and then, it must be stared at. Fantasy stories are a good place to start, and this one helps to serve those who need not use their imagination.

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#### **J.P. Ashman says**

Incredible list of contributors. Incredible artwork. So very proud to be a part of this charity anthology.

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#### **Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says**

Boom! Here it is! I have so many authors that I love in this book and that I'm friends with on Goodreads. BUT! I did not read this book free on kindle unlimited. I did not get a free copy like some of my friends from these authors. I bought the paperback at full price so I could give as much of the money for the charity. This book is supposed to be giving all the money to Doctors Without Borders and I'm all about charity. I think this is wonderful. I think these authors are awesome. The ones I know are awesome for actually talking to their fans here on Goodreads. It makes me feel good to talk to some of them. I'm hoping to meet some more awesome authors while reading this. Kudos to you you all! Mel ♥

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#### **Andy Cretney says**

Was a bit apprehensive starting this book, best part of a thousand pages, nearly forty authors. Some I've read, some I'm going to read and some I'd not even thought of reading. I've read many books and wondered how you'd manage to get the same depth of plot/story in what is, in essence a chapter. Also how do you review a book that is a selection of short stories by multiple authors. Here goes, spoiler free and no name dropping.

5 stars ??????????

What you see is what you get, some of the best authors of our time and genre writing a short story. I loved it, yeah I preferred some stories to others but overall each was a great little excerpt of their writing style and storytelling. If you just know one author in the above book, Get the book as it will lead you to others, it's as

simple as that. Great stories, some of which are new little stories from the authors bigger story arcs. And others great little intro's into authors who will be added to my tbr pile (some of the authors were already on it) all in all it was a great read and as each story was short I felt I was able to read another 'chapter' then another.

Great work everyone involved! And I haven't even mentioned it's for charity!

Cheers

Andy

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## **Lukasz says**

I love short stories and I'm always excited to put my hands on an anthology. There's something about the concept that I find exciting.

While I bought my share of anthologies throughout the years, I can't think of a single one that would really satisfy me.

The reason is simple, really. There are many voices and styles and I have my preferences. There's just no way I'll connect with everyone.

*The Art of War* is a collection of short fiction inspired by the theme of war. The project was started by Petros Triantafyllou and I have a lot of respect and admiration for the guy. Engaging forty established authors for a charity project may not be as easy as some may think. The thought behind the project and its goal to raise money for **Doctors Without Borders** is praiseworthy.

Having said that, I'll review the book as a book and not as a charity item.

So what was the focus of the anthology? The War and it's many faces. The stories in this anthology have quite a range of topics and ideas in them. From pure adventure to blood-soaked trenches and utter despair. Spread throughout these stories were aspects and ideals of heroism, war politics, sacrifice and faith in higher values.

Below you'll find mini (some micro or even nano) reviews of forty stories.

### **The Breaking of the Sky** by Ed McDonald: **3/5**

If someone hoped, despite the anthology theme, to get some lighthearted reading about noble soldiers rescuing kittens, Ed's here to destroy these hopes with a dark and dreary tale set in the Raven's Mark world. The story is depressing and brutal. Being nice girl in a time of war isn't recommended.

### **The Last Arrow** by Mitchell Hogan: **2/5**

Chewing chunks of rat meat, diarrhea, rotting bodies - that's some of "goodies" within the story. Soldiers are exhausted and starving. Hope is lost. There's also a magic arrow.

I liked the language but the story didn't make a lot of sense to me.

**Dear Menelaus** by Laura M. Hughes: **4/5**

This story is very short. It's actually a letter written by Helen of Troy to Menelaus to Menelaus. Helen isn't partial to his decision to invade Troy. She reflects upon men and women roles in times of war. I liked the language, I enjoyed the perspective and humor.

Nice, twisty short story.

**Warborn** by C.T. Phipps – **2/5**

A young woman summons a demon. Her choice of sacrificial blood isn't perfect but the demon appears anyway. Girl wants him to kill her parents who are Warborn (demons who enjoy mayhem and destruction; they're not best pals with guys from hell). It has a bit of a humor but the battle between demons is utterly disappointing and final twist unsurprising. It didn't impress me.

**The Greatest Battle** by John Gwynne - **2.5/5**

I did some google-fu. It seems that the story heroes are well known to Gwynne fans. Because I haven't read his books yet, I knew nothing about them. As a result, I can appreciate nice prose and pacing, but I felt lost. It was quite brutal.

**This War of Ours** by Timandra Whitecastle - **4/5**

I'm not sure when the story happens (bombarding is mentioned) but it's not really important. What's important is the fact that this story is self-contained and has a strong emotional impact. It follows Sparrow and her family who are on the run. Her mother is a Nightwitch, there are people (?) who want to catch them or at least one of her children. It's well written and has slightly unsettling ambiance I enjoyed.

**Shadows in the Mist** by Sue Tingey: **2/5**

Horror fantasy about a small war band finding something unexpected and dangerous into the battlefield. Truth be told, it's a forgettable and uninspiring story that lacked strong twist and ending.

**The Art: Post War** by RJ Barker: **3/5**

Beauty can be found everywhere, even in a ruined city. I liked this one. Second person storytelling works for me and this particular voice was fine. Also, I appreciate dark humor.

**The Fox and the Bowman** by Sebastian de Castell: **5/5**

It seems I made a mistake. A serious mistake. People kept on recommending de Castell books and I ignored the voice of reason. After finishing this short story his books get near the top of my TBR list.

It was, above all, fun, well written, well plotted and entertaining. Thomas is just about to kill a knight with the arrow through the head when mysterious Master Reynard appears and stops him. It seems the man with fox face has better plan to have revenge on the knights. The story moves through centuries, there's some cool magic and the writing has great flow. **Excellent short story.**

**Arrow's Wrath** by Charles F. Bond: **1/5**

Hmmm. Frankly, I didn't like this one. It lacked lightness, the prose was heavy and the ending was weak. Characters felt indistinct to me and the intrigue rather disappointing.

**Hard Lessons** by Michael R. Miller: **2/5**

Grim, dark, no humor involved. I didn't care for Scythe and couldn't get into the world. I guess Miller's readers might appreciate this one more than me. For me, though, it's the second warning sign (the other being author's short story in Lost Lore) suggesting I won't feel well in Miller's world.

**Battle for Elucame: Leah** by R.B. Watkinson: **1/5**

The protagonist is a violent rebel good with knives. She's focused on revenge. I dunno, I couldn't get into it and the story irked me in a way. I believe not everything is as clear as it should be in short story. Some terms that constitute part of the world weren't explained at all.

**The Revolution Changed Everyone** by D. Thourson Palmer: **2/5**

There's a twist here. But it didn't impress me. Neither has storytelling. It's an ok story about a healer working during a time of the bloody revolution. I was tempted to skip it.

**Misplaced Heroism** by Andrew Rowe: **3/5**

There a guy. Unlucky one. He was chilling drinking his coffee and enjoying reddit when the light blinded him and transported to the other world where he's supposed to save everyone from a demon. In order to do so, he studies spells.

It was an enjoyable story that played nicely with a chosen one trope. I would enjoy it more without the necessity to learn/read about magic levels and upgrades through potions and stuff. Some people are into RPG-ish elements in the stories but I'm on the opposite side of the target audience. Truth be told, I hate these elements. Can't help it.

Nevertheless, I appreciate final twist, a healthy dose of humor and the nicely crafted world.

**Violet** by Mazarkis Williams: **3/5**

Someone has taken something from Violet and she wants it back. Things get complicated as Violet doesn't have a lot of money and she'll need to go across the sea. In order to do so, she'll have to part with something important.

It's nicely written, well paced and enjoyable. I like it.

**The Two Faces of War** by Rob J. Hayes: **3/5**

It's a time of war. People are dying. A healer and a warrior speak about their experience and ask a question about the sense of it all.

I enjoyed dark humor and nice flow of the story.

**Grannit** by JP Ashman: **3.5/5**

Established and rich knight and a boy go to war. It's a nice story, not as dark as many gathered here and has good flow.

#### **Asalantir Forever** by Steven Poore: **4/5**

Well, it's well written and bloody. A group of people joins the assault to take the walls of Asalantir, Jin and her pride join the assault through the bloody trenches to take the walls of Asalantir. Her pride is nicely characterized in few short sentences and the pacing was excellent.

So far it's the first story that displays trenches, an image I have in my head when thinking about wars (due to the childhood nights spent in front of the TV).

I liked the language. It offers some strong imagery and nice sentences like this one:

Spill offers a flaccid skin. The Pride takes a mouthful each. The last of the water. It tastes of dirt and death, just as the air does.

I think this kind of short, concise sentences imagery sets the dreary tone well.

#### **Tower of the Last** by Steven Kelliher: **2/5**

While I can't say a bad word about the prose or pacing, I wasn't really thrilled with this one. Basically, it follows Madrek who ascends the tower and fights with others along the way. I don't know. It just didn't work for me.

#### **The Waving of the Flag** by Thomas R. Gaskin: **3.5/5**

The story follows Toris in two timelines. First happens in the past when young Toris was full of zeal and impatient to go to war where she hoped to be engaged in action and adventure. In the second timeline, he's practically last man standing on a bloody battlefield. Among dead bodies, blood and intestines.

It was done rather well, but due to format limitations wasn't 100% satisfying. On the other hand, it touched many subjects, also war politics in an interesting way.

Worth trying.

#### **The Art of War** by Brian Staveley: **5/5**

I may be biased when it comes to Staveley - I'm a huge fan of his prose and his stories. Having said that, he touches some themes in a subtle and satisfying way so I hope other readers will appreciate this story as well.

General Dakesh is a legend. Sculptors sculpt him, painters paint him in all his bloody glory. Dakesh is similar to Logen Nine Fingers. He's a nice bloke, rather cultural and finding satisfaction in watching grapes grow. But when he steps on the battlefield or arena, things change:

One moment, he felt ready to vomit up his own heart. The next, he was standing over the Mad

Bull's body, soaked in blood, a severed head clutched in his left hand

It's almost as a god of war inhabits him in times of stress and fight. The focus of the story lies elsewhere, though. Don't expect to see tons of bloody actions. Expect to receive a punch, though. Staveley's good with emotions.

**Hero of the Day** by Nathan T. Boyce: **2/5**

Golfrey is a luffer with royal blood. He's not particularly skilled with a bow and it's a shame as he's part of bowmen.

As usurper horseman advance, Golfrey analyzes the situation and tries to help.

The story touches the theme of those who become heroes despite their action being rather unheroic. But who'll notice it in the chaos of the battle?

There was a little and cruel twist but the writing felt a bit off to me.

**Sacred Semantics** by Nicholas Eames: **4.5/5**

Very, very good. Humorous, creative and twisty. There's a conflict. People are dying. Both sides believe in the Spider Goddess but one side of the conflict believes she has eight legs, their antagonists will die and kill to make a point that she actually has six legs. One side wears blueish-grey uniforms, the other blueish-grey.

Go read it. It's almost perfect.

**The War God's Axe** by Anne Nichols: **3.75/5**

Goat is a cripple. He lives among the people at the temple. Some of them are cruel him, some less. It seems Goat knows something that may save the day and the city. First, though, people need to believe him. There's a mind-reader called Brainspoon and few other interesting characters.

It was quite enjoyable but, truth be told, I wasn't fully invested in writing and characters.

**The Feather and the Paw** by Benedict Patrick: **5/5**

I loved this one.

The story takes place in the early days of the world, when the creatures of the forest had not yet lost the ability to speak, when dog and deer and man would tread alongside each other through the woodland, conversing happily about their hopes and misfortunes.

It's a dark fairy tale telling the story of the Lionfolk invading Magpie King forest under King Reoric lead.

It has excellent ambiance and nice ending. Some of the creatures from Benedict Patrick debut novel appear.

**Until the Light has Faded** by Graham Austin-King: **2.5/5**

It was gritty and dark. Reanne and Ferrin flee the fae army. They want to warn their people before it's too late.

While I enjoy Graham Austin-King prose and stories, I think this one doesn't work very well as a standalone and self-contained story.

**Under the Queen's Throne** by Ed Greenwood: **1/5**

Not much to say about this one, except for the fact it didn't work for me on any level. It doesn't mean it's bad. It's just not for me. Also, I didn't really appreciate this change of "direction".

**Good Steel** by Zachary Barnes: **3/5**

A fun story told from a piece of steel POV. Yes, you heard that right. Steel speaks about its face, elbows, experiencing blood for the first time and stuff.

It was quite fun and short. I believe it could be slightly better but, overall, it was enjoyable.

**The Cost of Power** by Ulf Lehmann: **2/5**

Well, this one feels more like the first chapter of a novel than self-contained short story. As such it doesn't really work well for me.

**The Undying Lands** by Michael R. Fletcher and his Doppels: **4.5/5**

If you're this far in the anthology and look forward to a ray of sunshine, a story that would show goodness and kindness in people in times of war, don't count on Mike Fletcher and his doppels. They'll shatter your hopes and bath you in blood and shit.

Fayad is going to die. She stabbed someone and now she finds herself in the arena with a rusty blade and little skill in using it. To survive she would have to defeat ten opponents.

It was grim and violent but also humorous in a dark way. A fine story.

**The Fall of Tereen** by Anna Smith-Spark: **3/5**

Death, death, death. Blood, blood, blood. Viscera, viscera, viscera.

You know that Anna Smith - Spark isn't called Queen of the Grimdark without a reason, right? Her style and prose are unique but I have to admit they tired me in this particular story.

**Valkyrie Rain** by Dyrk Ashton: **3/5**

Dyrk Ashton is a walking myths encyclopedia. He knows all gods and goddesses by name. He knows their birthdays, names of their little ones, spouses and lovers.

And he's willing to use this knowledge to craft his world.

While I appreciate knowledge, I prefer stories that don't introduce dozens of characters in few pages. It's strictly subjective but it doesn't work for me.

**Chattels** by Stan Nichols: **1.5/5**

The story starts with long and massive info dump written in italics. Infodumping in short story kills it for me. As it turns out, *Chattels* is one of few stories set in this world. The thing is I don't know this world and I expect stories in an anthology like this to be self-contained.

The story itself lacks a spark that would sustain my interest.

**The Storm** by Miles Cameron **3.5/5**

It was one of longest stories in the anthology. It's nicely plotted and a well written story about a siege and overcoming an impasse. Basically, it deserves, probably, higher rating but somehow I didn't fully connect with Great Sword Ipeas. I think I'll give it another go in some time.

**Shortblade** by Brandon Draga **4/5**

Light, nicely written, humorous with well-sketched characters. I enjoyed this one a lot. There's no blood and cruelty and yet it delivers a message. Well done Mr. Draga. Now you should think about changing your pen name (yes, yes, I know. I just couldn't stop myself).

**Rendered Chaos** by D.M. Murray **4/5**

Sontino DeVerocci is a sex-obsessed douchebag who enjoys fornication and alcohol. He loathes people and behaves deplorably. I would say it's almost impossible to like him. And yet he's a fun voice. He's been forced into the army as a painter. Some of his numerous sins come back to hit him.

And when the battle starts he follows the front lines looking for perfect images that would allow him to capture the beauty of war on paintings.

It's well written, twisty and fun.

**The Best and the Bravest** by M.L. Spencer - **3.5/5**

Michel loves and respects his father. That's why he finds pride in being his squire. His family doesn't live well with everyone. On this particular day, there's a fight with another ancient house. And the dead wights are watching.

The story is confusing at times but it has a strong and punchy ending. Worth reading.

**Exhibition** by Ben Galley: **3.5/5**

An interesting view on the Art of War theme. It's about war, art, and sense (or maybe lack of sense) of it all. Good ending.

**Flesh and Coin** by Anna Stephens: **3.5/5**



It's well written but damn, it's quite depressing – even despite some elements of dark and brutal humor. Syl Stoneheart is a mercenary. She's not happy with her name. She's not good at business partnerships. She's good at what she does, though. But so are other players presented in the story.

Truth be told, Anna Stephens' world may be too dark for me.

I'm tempted to read *Godblind* but it seems if I decide to do so, I'll have to download some Pratchett books on my Kindle to read something more positive in between pieces of grimdark reality and occasional bloodbath.

### **The Hero of Aral Pass** by Mark Lawrence: **5/5**

I have to confess I haven't read Jalan series yet. I know Jorg, I love Nona. Somehow, though, I haven't read Jalan series. A grave mistake I need to correct ASAP.

It was witty. It was funny. Also, it contains what I believe to be the perfect summary of war:

War is neither a science or an art, it's a fucking mess, and the only sane response to it is to run fast in the opposite direction.

Let's look at stats.

The Anthology contains forty short stories written by forty different authors. There was no way I could connect with all of them. The final results look this way and as they say, the truth is in numbers:

Loved: 4

Enjoyed: 7

Consider average: 15

Didn't really like: 10

Disliked: 4

Here's a graph.

On the whole, the writing level and my personal enjoyment (which is, to me, most important factor) varied mostly around a mediocre level. Some of it got a little worse; some a little better. There were obvious exceptions that you'll easily spot by looking at my ratings.

In the end, it might be that I've rated this anthology a little lower than it deserves, but if it is so, it's because my expectations were probably too high. After seeing all these cool author names I was expecting my mind to be blown by pure awesomeness. Sadly, it didn't happen.

I was strongly tempted to skip some of the stories. I haven't but the temptation was there.

It is important to note, though, that there are some gems here and given that the money earned by the book will be given to a charity and can make people's life better, I think it's worth time and very reasonable price.

I'm pretty sure everyone will find here stories and protagonists that will speak to him. Not necessarily the ones I've indicated as most interesting.

My top six stories are:

**The Art of War** by Brian Staveley

**The Hero of Aral Pass** by Mark Lawrence

**The Fox and the Bowman** by Sebastian de Castell

**The Feather and the Paw** by Benedict Patrick

**The Undying Lands** by Michael R. Fletcher and his Doppels

**Sacred Semantics** Nicholas Eames

I enjoyed these stories for different reasons but I think each of them allowed me to look at a theme of war/conflicts through a different lense.

I encourage fantasy fans to give this anthology a try. I'm sure everyone will find some gems and the money will serve those in need. It's a win-win transaction.

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## Mike says

I love anthologies. I love being able to read a book in bite-sized chunks, and I love being able to sample authors I've never read before without the commitment of trying an entire book. This was a good one, with lots of stories that I enjoyed in lots of different ways.

And now for some rapid fire thoughts on my favorites.

Laura M. Hughes: Her letter from Helen to Menelaus, and her determined refusal to let *her* face get blamed for the Thousand Ships, is delightfully perfect for the era of #MeToo.

Timandra Whitecastle: Holy crap. After that story, I need a fuzzy blanket, a mug of cocoa, and a puppy.

Sebastien de Castell: That was super interesting. *Greatcoats* gets moved up the queue.

Andrew Rowe: Ditto for *Sufficiently Advanced Magic*. That was hilarious.

Mazarkis Williams: This one mostly made me go, "Huh. I'm not sure what this was, but I liked it and I want more."

Nathan T. Boyce: OK, that just pissed me off. But in a good way.

Nicholas Eames: First one from an author I've already read and liked. This was a nice bite-sized introduction to his style. Recommended for those who are curious about *Kings of the Wyld* (which you should read, cause it's awesome).

Benedict Patrick: I like fantasy folk tales. This wasn't something I was expecting, but I really liked it.

Zachary Barnes: Once I realized what exactly I was reading, I loved it.

Michael R. Fletcher: First of all, this story is listed as having been written by “the combined efforts of Michael R. Fletcher’s Doppels.” I’m assuming there’s an explanation for that, but I don’t know it. The story itself was a lot of fun. He’s another added to my “check out what else he’s written” list.

Dyrk Ashton: I just recently read and enjoyed *Paternus*, and this was a nice side story. Not so sure how well it will work as a sampler, à la the Eames story I mentioned earlier, because it’s a very different style, but I loved it. Nicely addressed a few points the book had left me wondering about.

Miles Cameron: Cameron knows how to write about battle, and shows it off very well here. Another excellent sampler.

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## **Sam Hawke says**

Disclaimer: I received a free copy of the anthology from the publisher.

This is a mammoth anthology, with 40 (FORTY!) authors and stories. Now I know I tend toward wordiness at the best of times so I’m not going to set myself some kind of terrible challenge and talk about everything in here. But, in general, it’s worth noting a few things about the anthology as a collection.

First, it is thematically strong, with all bar a few stories really tying in nicely to the exploration of the art of war, but a huge range of takes on that concept within the book (some grim, some funny, some heartbreaking, some heartening). Second, it’s got some great authors you probably already know and love, and they all deliver, but there’s probably some stories in there by people you don’t know that are gonna knock your socks off (there were for me). Third, it’s entirely for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), so your money is going to one of the best causes you could ask for. It’d be a reeeeeeal shame if you didn’t buy this anthology, son. A real shame.

To my mind, there were a lot of enjoyable reads and only a couple that I really struggled with (remarkable, considering the sheer number of stories). Highlights for me were (in order of appearance not rating):

- Laura M Hughes, Dear Menelaus: This was probably the most unique story in format - a letter from Helen to Menelaus. Sharp and fresh take on an old story.
- John Gwynne, The Greatest Battle: If you know John’s work you’ll recognise the style and characters, but it stands, I think, as an enjoyable, well placed fragment of a bigger story, with entertaining characters and a typically engaging and well-written battle scene.
- Timandra Whitecastle, This War of Ours: this one HURT, man. Gut wrenching little tale of the price of violence and war on children. I read it twice. On reflection, likely my favourite story in the whole anthology. Will be keeping a VERY strong eye on the author.
- Steven Poore, Asalandir Forever: I’ve had a weakness for stories that deal with the particular futility of life in the trenches since *Blackadder Goes Forth*. This one had strong writing and powerful imagery.
- Brian Staveley, the Art of War: This one blew me away with the sheer scope and depth presented within such a short space. Thoughtful, beautifully written.
- Nicholas Eames, Sacred Semantics: I cannot really describe this story except to note that it is bloody hilarious and had me cracking up the whole way through. I was a bit careless about paying attention to who I was reading when but it wasn’t hard to pick this as the same writer who is currently delighting me with *Kings of the Wyld*.
- The combined efforts of Michael R Fletcher’s Doppels, The Undying Lands: Sort-of-zombies, colosseums, humour, tragedy and even a bit of romance, all in one package. Very entertaining and kept upsetting my

expectations. Excellent.

- Anna Smith-Spark, *The Fall of Tereen*: another author whose debut is sitting waiting on my TBR pile. It's been bumped up in priority after reading this story, which is one of the standouts in terms of quality and uniqueness of prose. The style is probably not for everyone but I loved it. Very dark though!

- Dyrk Ashton, *Valkyrie Rain*: A nuanced and interesting telling of the Valkyries' fall from and return to grace.

- Miles Cameron, *The Storm*: An awesome self contained siege story with a lot of character. I really enjoyed this.

- Anna Stephens, *Flesh and Coin*: Mercenaries and ambushes and brutal action with emotional punch, surprise, and even a few laughs. This story does a lot. If you haven't read *Godblind* you're going to want to go out and get it after you've read this sample of her writing. Loved it.

- Mark Lawrence, *The Hero of Aral Pass*: Great finish to the anthology - action-packed, compelling voice, funny and dark. Classic Lawrence.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the stories I enjoyed but they're the ones that stayed with me. I'd be stunned if you couldn't find a bunch you like in there. Overall, I found it a delight, and I'll be getting the paperback with the beautiful art to add to my collection.

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