



Swords & Dark Magic: The New Sword and Sorcery

Jonathan Strahan (Editor) , Lou Anders (Editor) , Steven Erikson (Contributor) , Glen Cook (Contributor) , Gene Wolfe (Contributor) , James Enge (Contributor) , C.J. Cherryh (Contributor) , K.J. Parker (Contributor) , more... Garth Nix (Contributor) , Michael Moorcock (Contributor) , Tim Lebbon (Contributor) , Robert Silverberg (Contributor) , Greg Keyes (Contributor) , Michael Shea (Contributor) , Scott Lynch (Contributor) , Tanith Lee (Contributor) , Caitlín R. Kiernan (Contributor) , Bill Willingham (Contributor) , Joe Abercrombie (Contributor) ...less

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Seventeen original tales of sword and sorcery penned by masters old and new

Elric ... the Black Company ... Majipoor. For years, these have been some of the names that have captured the hearts of generations of readers and embodied the sword and sorcery genre. And now some of the most beloved and bestselling fantasy writers working today deliver stunning all-new sword and sorcery stories in an anthology of small stakes but high action, grim humor mixed with gritty violence, fierce monsters and fabulous treasures, and, of course, swordplay. Don't miss the adventure of the decade!

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Swords & Dark Magic: The New Sword and Sorcery Details

Date : Published June 22nd 2010 by Harper Voyager

ISBN : 9780061723810

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Format : Paperback 517 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Anthologies, Short Stories, Heroic Fantasy, Sword and Sorcery, Fiction, Dark Fantasy

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From Reader Review Swords & Dark Magic: The New Sword and Sorcery for online ebook

Miriam says

A couple good stories (Enge and Parker stand out) but overall disappointing. In some cases, such as Ericson, whom I've not read prior, it may be that the author is simply not to my taste, but several I had liked before and didn't enjoy here.

Terence says

Overall a very solid anthology. Only two stories would I consider not worth my time - Silverberg's "Dark Times at the Midnight Market" and Willingham's "Thieves of Daring" - and some were *very* good.

"Goats of Glory," Steven Erikson. I'm an Erikson groupie so he'd have to stumble pretty badly to get a bad review from me. The story revolves around the moral compromises a village makes to survive, and the demon-fighting skills of Captain Skint and her company. Nothing profound but an entertaining story.

"Tides Elba: A Tale of the Black Company," Glen Cook. This is probably some of Cook's best writing I've seen since the "final" book of *The Black Company* (Soldiers Live). In those books, Croaker periodically mentions that he glosses over the less savory activities of the Company, activities that would get them hauled before the International Criminal Court if committed here. This is a tale of one of those activities, and it's disturbing and distressing to those of us who like and respect Croaker and his companions.

"Bloodsport," Gene Wolfe. Not bad. It's the usual Wolfe story where you have to read it several times to figure out exactly what's happening (and even then... :-)

"The Singing Spear," James Enge. I'm not familiar with this author but the story was decent, with an interesting twist regarding the spear of the title.

"A Wizard of Wiscezan," C.J. Cherryh. This is another good piece of writing from an author whose last few novels have disappointed. It turns on a young wizard learning to trust himself and it satisfies.

"A Rich Full Week," K.J. Parker. I tried reading Parker's *Engineer* trilogy without success so I wasn't really expecting much from this story. Which isn't to say I didn't like it; I'm not, however, rushing out to pick up more of the author's work.

"A Suitable Present for a Sorcerous Puppet," Garth Nix. Not memorable but enjoyable enough while reading.

"Red Pearls: An Elric Story," Michael Moorcock. I haven't been keeping up with the *Elric* saga since Stormbringer largely because it was becoming to "meta" for my tastes, despite the fact that Moorcock's depiction of the eternal struggle between Law and Chaos was becoming more nuanced. However, this is a good episode from the doomed Melnibonean's life.

"The Deification of Dal Bamore: A Tale from Echo City," Tim Lebbon. Interesting tale about the conflict between a dominant religion and some "heretics." Neither side is particularly attractive.

"Dark Times at the Midnight Market," Robert Silverberg. I took a dislike to Majipoor Chronicles when I was a teen, and my distaste for Silverberg continues. This is a tired old story about love potions and their dangers whose ending was visible before the first paragraph ended.

"The Undefiled," Greg Keyes. I don't enjoy reading about Keyes' Fool Wolf character so this story wasn't particularly enjoyable to read in that respect but otherwise, it's a decent tale.

"Hew the Tintmaster," Michael Shea. If this is an "official" Cugel the Cudgel story then the only advice I can give Mr. Shea is don't try to be Jack Vance and leave the Dying Earth in peace. The tale itself is not bad if not memorable but it's *most definitely NOT* Vance (or even really Vancian in flavor).

"In the Stacks," Scott Lynch. For whatever reason the whole *Locke Lamora* craze has not afflicted me and, after reading this tale, I remain uninfected. Again, the story isn't badly written or unentertaining but it didn't impress me.

"Two Lions, a Witch, and the War-Robe," Tanith Lee. Lee is a wonderful writer and this is another example of her talents. Despite the title, there's more Jack Vance than C.S. Lewis about the tale of two maybe half-brothers and a cursed prince (certainly more Vance here than in Shea's story). A good collection solely of Lee's stories is Red as Blood.

"The Sea Troll's Daughter," Caitlin R. Kiernan. Kiernan is another author I count myself a groupie of so expect little objectivity here. I liked the story. Not least because it reminded me of a fairy tale I wrote for my nieces a few Christmases ago (which you can read on GR here).

"Thieves of Daring," Bill Willingham. This story just really annoyed me.

"The Fool Jobs," Joe Abercrombie. With qualifications, I liked Abercrombie's *The First Law* trilogy so I expected to and wasn't disappointed in liking this tale. Another example of a good if not long-term memorable story.

Angry says

Intro

So this is a little different from my normal fare. I generally dislike short stories as they feel unfinished. Or perhaps I dislike unfinished short stories? But anyway, I think my prejudices will show up in my rankings. I generally demand a story: somebody wants something, challenges to get that want, and then success or failure. I can see that this kind of structure is much easier to achieve in longer narrative, but there are some short stories that actually did it for me.

Another thing I'm considering - would I want to read other stories by the same author? So.. onto the stories!

Goats of Glory by Steven Erikson: 3/5

OK, I've only read the first of the Malazan books, so I can't tell if this fits somewhere in amongst that series' world, but it really felt like it does :) This seems like a classic horror story - the isolated townfolk wary of strangers, the unwelcome strangers who look on the locals as hicks, and the mysterious "haunted house" that the strangers are herded towards... Great setup, and I started to care about the locals! Then the "reveal" which was pretty mediocre and a final twist that didn't really feel like a twist (as it didn't change anything of importance in the story)...

An enjoyable ride, but the "climax" felt like treading water as there was nothing really at stake....

Tides Elba by Glen Cook: 4/5

Oh I love the stories of the Black Company, and getting back with Croaker and his cohorts felt like snuggling up in front of a warm fire... with the smelly Taken "Limper" for company... This was a tiny complete story that could be from any time of the Company's service to the Lady: while on garrison the company is ordered to uncover a rebel leader and take her prisoner... but Limper is playing his own games and the troops need to outsmart him while following orders.

More of a character study, with a bit of mystery thrown in. But there was a distinct goal, problems and complications, and a distinct outcome... and it makes me want to go back and read the Chronicles once again!

Bloodsport by Gene Wolf: 1/5

Huh?

Seemed interesting - a society built around what sounded like a fancy game of chess using real people as pieces, following the story of a knight and a pawn... I didn't quite get the point perhaps? Everything seems, in the end, to be pointless? I've not read Gene Wolf before, and this story makes me hesitant to want to try...

The Singing Spear by James Enge: 5/5

Why have I never heard of this author before! I loved this tale of a suicidal-alcoholic mage who just wants to drown his sorrows, but his own creation (said Singing Spear) comes back to haunt him (and interrupt his drinking). At turns hilarious, tragic, horrific, and full of tension!

Now I need to find more! Morlock the maker was an awesome character that I want to read more about!

A Wizard in Wiscezan by C.J. Cherryh: 3/5

An interesting little tale about an apprentice magician, down on his luck, and his big test going up against a demon... and his only magic is a knack for illusions.

A fun read, with a nice "magic system" that made for some great tension, but the characterisation is a little dry.

A Rich Full Week by K.J. Parker: 5/5

Wow. Another completely unknown (to me) author, and a fantastic story. About a travelling "wizard" (who calls himself a philosopher and scientist), who goes on rounds fixing problems in various farms and towns. This one is a problem with a dead man who doesn't want to stay dead... It felt straight out of Norse mythology - a Draugr - complete with the swelling, strength, and conversations. But the "magic" and reference to schooling and testing.. This was fantastic! It is the "The Witcher" but with less cynicism.

I need to read more! I hope there are other stories about this setting, and the magical Order.

A Suitable Present for a Sorcerous Puppet by Garth Nix: 2/5

Hmm.. Nod a bad yarn. A Knight convalescing in a nunnery with a "sorcerous puppet" as his companion. There were some good parts, but the writing felt a little heavy on Important Capitalised Names of Important Places... At least Sir Hereward and his (failed) attempts to hit on the young nun were a bit of needed levity.

Red Pearls by Michael Moorcock: 3/5

Hey, Elric! Yep, we're back in what feels like a classic tale of Elric. Here he is travelling with his companion Moonglum as they pay a visit to "the other side of the world".... literally, as they go over the edge in a special boat. Everything screams classic Elric to me in this story - from the use of slightly archaic words to the overly dramatic descriptions. Basically he's headed to visit a relative to collect the "white sword", law-following version of his own Stormbringer chaos-sword. But as always he gets dragged into a local problem

and his family oaths bind him into a less than optimal path.

I'd probably give it more, but it feels a little too familiar to all the other Elric stories. (which isn't necessarily a bad thing...) This is also the longest of the stories in this book so far...

The Deification of Dal Balmore by Tim Lebbon: 2/5

This felt like a "fantasy retelling" of the Jesus parable... told from the point of view of the Officials. A rebel leader captured and tortured for 3 days - who has a mythic power over life and death, and who needs to be publicly killed to avoid his followers thinking him a god... But this has a neat twist :)

The writing wasn't awesome, but did the job, and the characters were similarly serviceable.

Dark Times at the Midnight Market by Robert Silverberg: 4/5

Ah, this was awesome - but hey, its Silverberg! This is a cute tale about an alchemist - a seller of potions and magic items - who gets caught up in plots of the powerful. I REALLY felt for the poor little guy (really, knee high) and his two headed partner. Offered stupid sums of money to make a love potion, and dealing with an arrogant noble who cant make up his mind what, exactly, he wants the potion to do.

Awesome writing, and full of little details that just make this a joy to read.

The Undefiled by Greg keys: 2/5

An interesting story, well written. I suppose this is the kind of thing a short story aims for - except the characters felt a little hollow... i just didn't really care about the main character as he didn't seem to care about a whole lot other than himself. He's possessed by a spirit that makes him go crazy (like a were-wolf, but without the physical changes... i think) and he seems to want to rid himself of the riding-spirit, but gets involved in some local trouble and wanders off on an assigned quest so he might "save the girl"... but he doesn't really like the girl or care much for what happens to her, and nothing is keeping him there other than "hey, i'm curious about this whole thing"...

Better motivations might make this otherwise great story even better.

Hew the Tintmaster by Michael Shea: 0/5

No. Just no.

I started reading a few pages, and the writing is just terrible. Overly flowery, ornate, and just pure description for pages... and again with the Important Capitalised Words of Importance... DNF (very rare for me)

In the Stacks by Scott Lynch: 4/5

Oh boy. Why do I love the idea of magical libraries? I guess it started with Discworld and the Unseen University's library.. But this story takes it to another level. The library in question is like an aggressive tardis - bigger on the inside, and full of strange magical creatures that do not like you interfering with the books. This story is about a group of students who have to return books...

I love it!

Only problem (although a fairly big sized one) is that the characters are hard to distinguish at times. But I would read a whole series about Lazlo the apprentice magician and the great library :)

Two Lions, a Witch, and the War-Robe by Tanith Lee: 2/5

Ok. I don't really know why this rubbed me the wrong way. Its a nice little tale of two men caught up in magical misdeeds - it felt very "swords & sorcery", but once again we hit the problem of motivation. The two men are just going about their business when set upon by "town guards" who are more criminal than anything else, and so are ensorcelled to undertake a quest...

I think that there is my issue. Neither of the main character want to be there, and don't care about the outcome of said quest other than "i get to survive" and are both very flippant about everything...

But that being said, it is a well written tale that is clever and well rounded - shame about our main characters

though.

The Sea Troll's Daughter by Caitlín R. Kiernan: 3/5

This was fun. A nice twist on a hoary old trope. A monster-hunter comes to town claiming to have killed the local threat, the Sea Troll... but with no proof. Then arguments and accusations begin. Then the relatives show up :)

It kept hinting at the expected, then taking the story in a different direction. Our (initially unnamed) heroine seems awesome, but then descends into a drunken stupor, but the rest of the townfolk carry the story. One of the few non-single-PoV short stories, but it works.

Thieves of Daring by Bill Willingham: 2/5

At first this reminded me of some old Conan stories, and I got excited. But once again we fall to the old problem of "where is the story?" which annoys me. This is about a bunch of local yahoos who decide to steal from a magicians house, and we're dropped in just as people are dying. Who are these people again and why should I care? To make it worse the ending isn't, it is just open ended and made me think that this is a chapter excerpt - maybe chapter 4 or 5 in a bigger book.

On the other hand, it is REALLY well written to remind me of R.E. Howard's works. Makes me want to see if this author has done anything longer...

The Fools Jobs by Joe Abercrombie: 5/5

Ahh, Mr Abercrombie you never fail to delight. This is (I think) a bit of a prequel to "The Heroes" where we meet Craw and his band of named going on a raiding expedition against a little hold in the middle of nowhere - apparently seeking a treasure for the sorceress, but no one knows what it is they are really looking for "You'll know it when you see it"...

I adore the characterisation, especially Craw (with his tired outlook on life) and Whirrun (who is too earnest for words).

After reading this I want to go back and read all of Abercrombie's book again!

Other Thoughts

Wow. I am so glad I read this book! Some of these are astounding writing that I feel the need to chase down a whole slew of authors i've never read before. A couple of these were not so good, but on the whole this has given me a new appreciation for short stories!

Steve says

At 517 pages, *Swords & Dark Magic* is quite a load, even as an anthology. I confess, there were a number of these that I grew impatient with and just skipped. I either didn't like the tone or approach, and/or felt that I'd been there and done that story-wise. It's interesting looking at the reviews for this book, since a number of reviewers, ones I really respect, are all over the place as far as what they like. So maybe this collection is more a success than I thought, since folks did find work that met their expectations as far Sword & Sorcery.

Me? I tend to like such stories best when they cast a spell via language and exotic (and ominous) imagery. Old school would have me liking Clark Ashton Smith, which is why I liked Gene Wolfe's "Bloodsport." Wolfe can be very frustrating to read, but this one worked for me. Close behind, is the blood & guts action pieces, like Robert E. Howard's Conan stories. So with that in mind, I found common company in Scott Erikson's "Goats of Glory," and Tim Lebbon's "Deification of Dal Bamore." A few comments on the stories below:

"Goats of Glory," by Scott Erikson. Good siege story, that reverses expectations. Might be the most wickedly fun story in this collection. Great placement by the editors.

"Tides Elba," by Glenn Cook. Skipped it. A lot of people like Cook, but I've yet to get traction with his voice. As always, I just feel like I'm reading a thinly cloaked story about a platoon of modern day soldiers. I suppose that's the point, but the result is that I don't feel I'm really reading Fantasy.

"Bloodsport," by Gene Wolfe. Reality blurs. Mysterious, poetic, mythic. I liked this story quite a bit. Don't ask what it's about, because I'm not sure I can answer the question. But with it's language, it just doesn't seem to matter.

"The Singing Spear," by James Enge. It's OK. But how many stories have you read about drunk magicians (gunfighters, soldiers, etc.), pulling it together for one more duel? The story line seemed tired to me. You can always Make It New, but I'm not sure Enge did so.

"A Wizard in Wiscezan," by C.J. Cherryh. In general, I like Cherryh's distinctive voice. But here, while I was on board for most of the story, the ending felt rushed. I was disappointed.

"A Rich Full Week," by K.J. Parker. I've not read Parker before, but I liked this one, but for unexpected reasons. Fantasy often employs horror elements within its stories, but here I think you have a Horror story (a zombie type thing), with a few Fantasy trappings (magicians). And it's a good Horror story. I'll say no more.

"A Suitable Present for a Sorcerous Puppet," by Garth Nix. My first Nix read. I liked this one quite a bit. I'm no fan of humorous fantasy, so this one had to clear that bar from the get-go. There are a number of stories in this anthology that follow a similar path, but this is the only one I liked. A wounded knight recovers in a castle, with a beautiful attendant, a loyal puppet, and a book he should probably leave alone. Fun stuff.

"Red Pearls," by Michael Moorcock. An Elric novella. That alone is probably enough of a reason to pick up this collection. If you're an Elric fan, you won't be disappointed.

"The Deification of Dal Bamore," by Tim Lebbon. I've read a few of Lebbon's Horror efforts, and found them OK. He seems much more comfortable with Blood & Guts Fantasy. I liked this one a lot. Rebels, Black Magic, an Empire trying to hold on, and Street Fighting Men. Good stuff.

"Dark Times at the Midnight Market," by Robert Silverberg. Skipped it.

"The Undefiled," by Greg Keyes. The darkest story in the collection. I've not read Keyes before, but this one impressed me. Really dark.

"Hew the Tintmaster," by Michael Shea. For the most part I thought Shea did a good job recreating Vance's world. But then Cugel shows up. I come fairly recent reading of Vance's Cugel, a very distinctive character, who devolves before your eyes. One of the great anti-heroes in any fiction. Shea does nothing with him. He would of been better off not including him. I thought the story fizzled at the end (though it opens wonderfully). A disappointment.

"In the Stacks," by Scott Lynch. Skipped it. Couldn't get into it. A lot of people seem to like this one, so maybe I'll revisit it again one these years.

"Two Lions, A Witch, and a War-robe," by Tanith Lee. Skipped it. But at this point Fantasy fatigue was

starting to set in. Of the skipped stories, this is the one I'm most likely to try again. I was kind of turned off by the C.S. Lewis reference. (I'm not a Narnia fan.)

"The Sea Troll's Daughter," by Caitlin Kiernan. I'm a big fan of this writer, but I was kind of disappointed with this one. Kiernan is clearly mining Beowulf, and some other old tales, trying to come up with something new. The result seemed to be a kind of subversive hodge podge that just didn't click. But with Kiernan, you always have the language as a fall back.

"Thieves of Daring," by Bill Willingham. I think this is the shortest story in the collection, and without doubt the most unnecessary. Very slight.

"The Fool Jobs," by Joe Abercrombie. A crusty and varied group of thieves gather...and that's as far I got, since by this point I had grown bored with the collection. I figure this will be slotted along side Erickson & Lebbon, but I need a break...

Oh, and all of this starts off with a pretty good Introductory essay by the editors.

Stefan says

Swords & Dark Magic: The New Sword and Sorcery is an excellent new anthology of original short fantasy fiction, featuring an impressive mixture of established genre masters and newer, highly talented authors. The book's introduction, by editors Lou Anders and Jonathan Strahan, does an excellent job defining the sword & sorcery sub-genre and placing it in its historical context. This is an interesting read for anyone who wants to learn more about the history of the genre and doesn't have a copy of John Clute and John Grant's *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* handy, but the main value of any anthology lies in the stories, and in that area it doesn't disappoint in the slightest.

Most of the stories in Swords & Dark Magic: The New Sword and Sorcery are good, several are great, and even the few less successful entries are still interesting and well worth the time spent to read them, often because they are less impressive stories by otherwise very impressive and famous authors, such as Steven Erikson, Glen Cook and Gene Wolfe. If those authors had brought their top game to the table here, this anthology would be nothing less than a must-own, but as it is, it's still an excellent collection.

Here are a few of my favorite stories, in order of their appearance in the anthology:

* K.J. Parker's "A Rich Full Week" has to be one of the strangest zombie tales ever, and definitely features the most reasonable undead you'll ever find. I enjoyed the way this story put a new, metaphorical twist on the traditional "zombies eating brains," as well as its smart-alec main character.

* Michael Moorcock's "Red Pearls". Put plainly and simply, if you are a fan of the seminal *ELRIC OF*

MELNIBONÉ series, you must read this story. It adds an (as far as I know) entirely new side to the novels' world, and even though it's not the strongest story in the anthology, for that reason alone it's a must-read for fans.

* Tim Lebbon's "The Deification of Dal Bamore" is a dark and disturbing story of religion and magic. It's is an excellent teaser for the author's forthcoming novel, Echo City, which shares its setting.

* Robert Silverberg's "Dark Times at the Midnight Market" (set in the MAJIPOOR universe) is an old-fashioned and utterly charming tale about the effects of a love potion. The ending is a bit predictable, but what comes before has a Jack Vance-like charm I really enjoyed.

* Greg Keyes' "The Undefiled" offers a dark, mysterious view on godhood and possession, and is one of the most intriguing stories in the anthology.

* Michael Shea's "Hew the Tintmaster" is listed as a "fully authorized new Cugel the Clever adventure," and if you're at all familiar with Cugel, that's probably enough to get you very excited. When Michael Shea describes his main character (Bront the Inexorable) as having "shoulders as muscled as a titanoplod's thigh," and has Cugel introduce himself as an "itinerant entrepreneur," you know that Jack Vance's famous character is in very good hands here. This is probably my favorite story in the anthology, although...

* ... Scott Lynch's "In the Stacks" is a very close competitor. If (like me) you were hoping for Locke Lamora, you'll be disappointed, but fortunately "In the Stacks" is just as entertaining as the author's GENTLEMAN BASTARDS novels. This story, about students venturing into a magical library that resembles a significantly less friendly version of Terry Pratchett's Unseen University library, is simply a blast to read.

* Caitlin R. Kiernan's "The Sea Troll's Daughter" is a beautifully told story and maybe the purest actual "sword & sorcery" tale in the anthology.

* Joe Abercrombie's "The Fool Jobs" is a perfectly entertaining, smoothly told story that ends the anthology on a high note. If (like me) you haven't had the chance to try the author's novels yet, you'll probably feel very motivated to do so, especially after this story's hilarious ending.

If you happen to have any friends who are under the impression that all fantasy is elfy-welfy, gauzy, long-winded fluff, this showcase of tight, gritty, hard-edged and occasionally very funny fantasy fiction is a great way to rectify their misapprehensions. It's also a great anthology to get started with some of the genre's major authors and find out about newer, noteworthy writers. Despite a few disappointing entries by otherwise excellent authors, the overall quality of Swords & Dark Magic: The New Sword and Sorcery is very high. Recommended.

Evgeny says

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

So as I mentioned this is an anthology of short fantasy (presumably sword and sorcery, but you really have to stretch the definition) stories. While we are here let us give a tribute to the grandfather of the genre who is still the unsurpassed badass:

The collection consists of the following:

Goats of Glory by Steven Erikson.

Five surviving soldiers came to a quiet backwater village to have a restful sleep. It turns out, something is not quite right in there and poor guys got every fun imaginable - including desperate fights for their lives - except for rest and relaxation.

This does not have anything to do with Malazan. I finished his magnum opus and it left me relatively cold. It turns out when Erikson is severely limited by the length of the story he writes (these are not called **short** stories for nothing) he can be great. No people whining non-stop about the miseries of life for 900+ pages, no endless wanderings in a handy desert, but good action. It is still typical Erikson which means I could predict even the last line of the tale had I thought about it, but it is still worth **4 stars**.

Tides Elba: A Tale of the Black Company by *Glen Cook*.

The tale takes part between the first and the second books of the main series. A whole lot of familiar faces are back, including Captain, Lieutenant, Elmo, Silent, Otto, Hagop, Goblin, and One-Eye. It turns out the last two had an apprentice called Third! Poor guy. Croaker often mentioned that the Company is not nice, but he rarely shows really nasty parts. This one is one of such rare moments.

This was **the** reason I got my hands on this anthology. People familiar with my reviews know I love the series. The only catch is you need to be already familiar with the characters to fully enjoy the story. One-Eye winning in cards alone worth the whole book. Add to this great dialog and Croaker narration and you have **4 stars** - if you have read at least the first book of the main series.

Red Pearls: An Elric Story by *Michael Moorcock*.

Elric travels to the other side of the world (make it whatever you want from this description) in search of something. The other side turned out to be quite strange. There are some people/creatures to kill and some souls to drink with the fabled Stormbringer.

This one was a mild disappointment. On one hand, it was too weird even for an Elrik story. On the other hand, it is too ordinary for an Elrik story. Sounds confusing, but this is exactly my impression. Oh, and the final resolution was way too simplistic. **3 stars** on the weak side of 3.

The Fool Jobs by *Joe Abercrombie*.

A band of ragtag northern barbarians led by a guy named Craw who appears in Heroes (the best book of the series, in my opinion) is about to commit a heist. What could possibly go wrong? Let me give you a hint: everything.

This could have been excellent, but it does have a big problem: the story itself cannot decide whether it is humorous, or grimdark. It started kind of funny, but quickly developed into a good old massacre. As a result it does not quite succeed in either. **3.5 stars** rounded up to 4 just because Craw is my favorite character of the favorite book of the series.

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

Michael says

Introduction: Check Your Dark Lord at the Door by *Lou Anders & Jonathan Strahan*

I always believe that a good anthology needs a strong introduction to set the tone of what is contained within the anthology itself. This intro purports (as the title suggests) that this is a collection of new Sword & Sorcery which is to help modernise the genera of Sword & Sorcery, but also pay homage to those writers whom originally help create this genera.

Goats of Glory by *Steven Erikson*:

This opening story to this anthology is based upon five weary mercenaries, Captain Skint, Sergeant Flapp, Wither, Dullbreath, and Huggs, who are travelling on horseback, through a mountain pass into a river valley. Members of the Rams, they are now the only five left after a year of fighting on the Demon Plain, where once they numbered a thousand.

Arriving in the sleepy hamlet of Glory, notable only for a ruined keep looming above the edge of town, they seek cold drink, food, and a room for the night. The local tavern can provide the first two, but there is no inn. Why not shelter the night in the ancient keep on the hill as recommended by the barkeep? As the sky darkens, the soldiers trudge up the hill to their new accommodations. Meanwhile, the town's gravedigger has eagerly prepared five new plots in the local cemetery...

The story is not part of the Malazan series but is set in the Malazan world created by Erikson, I will definitely be diving into the Malazan series in the future.

Tides Elba: A Tale Of Black Company by Glen Cook

This short story takes place between the first and the second books of the main series, as a result I felt that I was missing out on a lot of the story as I have not read the other books, but I felt that this short story was a great story which worked well as a story on its own.

I enjoyed the main characters in this story (Captain, Lieutenant, Elmo, Silent, Otto, Hagop, Goblin, and One-Eye), they were well written and worked well together. Croaker mentions that the Company is not nice, but he rarely shows the really nasty parts.

I will definitely be looking into reading the rest of the series.

Bloodsport by Gene Wolfe

This was an interesting story, unique amongst the bunch. The style of writing this story has, gives a very old feel to it, with a rather mysterious feel to it, I also found it to be a slightly dark story with hints of romance intertwined into it, and an original idea that plays on an old classic game of strategy. I had the idea of a game of chess being played out through the story in the why the fighting is described. I enjoyed how the story flowed in the way it was written.

The Singing Spear by James Enge

I'd never read any of James Enge's work before reading this anthology. And that's the beauty of a decent anthology; reading works from familiar authors, exploring works of authors that you have only heard of in passing, and being introduced to new authors altogether. And I have to say this story, is one of my favourite's within this anthology. This beautifully written short story was full of dark fantastic imagery, brilliant main characters, booze, swords, sorcery and violence. The story also hearkens to the masters of the genre. It reminded me most of Howard's work in the style it is written, it also has touches of humour throughout instead of a strictly serious plot.

A Wizard In Wiscezan by C. J. Cherryh

This story felt slightly different than the rest of the stories, in the way in which it's told. Yet it doesn't strike me as wholly unique either. To me this story has more of a '*High-Fantasy*' feel to it rather than a '*Sword & Sorcery*' than previous entries in the anthology. A young boy in training to be a magician, set on a daunting task. This feels like it could be the beginning of a larger quest than a short story and would do well as a longer story. I really enjoyed this story and it was a good introduction to her work as I have never read any of her work.

A Rich Full Week by K. J. Parker

Somewhat dark, yet humorous short story which is my introduction to K. J. Parker's work. The story revolves around a young priest, the undead and some strange magic. This story I think maybe not strictly '*Sword & Sorcery*', but I feel like it's only maybe a step removed. I enjoyed the way this story was written

and has a certain wry charm to it that I quite enjoyed.

A Suitable Present for a Sorcerous Puppet by Garth Nix

This is the first time I have read any of Garth Nix's work and I enjoyed this short story. A wounded knight recovering in a castle, with a beautiful attendant, a loyal puppet, and a book that he should probably leave alone. This was a fun short story, which had more of a light-hearted feel to it.

I found this story had a feel of being part of a larger story. I think that this story could be just one amongst many, like how the Conan stories.

Red Pearls: An Elric Story by Michael Moorcock

I have heard of Michael Moorcock as an author but have never read any of his work. Part of the Elric series it continues where Elric's story left off, with the morally ambiguous (at best) main character, and twisting tales full of fast paced action. This time on an ill-fated journey to the world below, the underside of his own known world, to claim the White Sword. This is in my mind a brilliant source and sorcery story and I will be considering reading more of the Elric stories.

The Deification of Dal Bamore: A Tale from Echo City by Tim Lebbon

This is one dark short story. Filled with gore, violence and torture. The main character is, at best, an anti-hero. The story has as much in common with a horror as it does with dark fantasy and Sword & Sorcery fiction. Even so I liked this story, I found it to be very unique in its style and execution and was really well written.

Dark Times at the Midnight Market by Robert Silverberg

I loved this short story and wished that it was longer and had been expanded upon. I liked how this story was written, even though all they were doing were producing a love potion for one of the aristocracy, Robert Silverberg's writing style really brought the Midnight Market, and the small shop alive as well as the relationship between the 2 mages who ran the shop Shostik-Willeron and Ghambivole Zwoll. I feel that there could be a lot more to this story, I'd love to read more.

The Undefined by Greg Keyes

I found this story to be very dark yet really well written, filled with violence and sorcery which fitted into this anthology well. The writing style felt distinctly modern, yet the subject matter and format (recurring characters on a new quest) hearkened to a more traditional Sword & Sorcery style. I felt that this short story is part of a larger series of adventures and that there is a lot more to be told here. I feel like this story is a brilliant example of '*The new Sword & Sorcery*' style and a great addition to this anthology.

Hew the Tintmaster by Mivhael Shea

I found this addition to this anthology to be more of a science fantasy story rather than falling into the *Sword & Sorcery* genre. Overall it was an interesting adventure with an original plot and characters and was very descriptive in its writing. The imagery used in this story was different to what I've read before relating a lot of the story to colours through one of the main characters *Hew*. Not one of my favourite stories in this anthology, but I did enjoy the plot of the story.

In the Stacks by Scott Lynch

This is a re-read for me, I originally listened to this story as a podcast (<http://podcastle.org/2012/03/13/podca...>), and have once reviewed this story on Goodreads so I've included parts of my original review here and have expanded a little. I enjoyed reading this story as a hard copy as I feel that you have a greater feel for the story when you have a paper copy.

The plot itself follows a group of magic students undertaking their fifth-year exams, which itself sounds

simple: returning a book to the library. The library which is not only full of books of magic, but also creatures attracted the knowledge and magic in the library, the also library seems to have its own sort of consciousness, because of so much magic being contained within the library. The students must work together to return their assigned books to pass the exam.

Scott Lynch has been able to create his own magical library with its own personality which stands out from other library's in other fantasy books/series i.e. from Pratchett's 'Discworld', Rowling's 'Harry Potter', Rothfuss's 'The King Killer Chronicle'.

I feel that this story made a great addition to this anthology although I think the story relates slightly more to high fantasy rather than *Sword & Sorcery* I think it was a brilliantly written short story which was easy to get lost in and I wished that it didn't come to an end.

Two Lions, a Witch, and the War-Robe by Tanith Lee

This is my first reading of any of Tanith Lee's work and I did enjoy how this story was written and I liked the play on the title playing on C.S Lewis's work (although I haven't read any of C.S. Lewis's work yet). Swordplay, sorcery, booze and quests, pretty much spot one for this story and it fits into this anthology nicely. Though not a terribly dark story compared to other S&S stories within this anthology, I found it in parts to be rather comical and light hearted. The story itself is simple enough, but as it develops it takes a life of its own. The characters have a certain wit and charm that makes them enjoyable and fun to follow through their adventure.

The Sea Troll's Daughter by Caitlin R. Kiernan

This is my first introduction to Kiernan's work and I found it to be an enjoyable read. To me it checks off all the boxes needed for a Sword & Sorcery story, booze, carousing, violence, swords, sorcery, a good prose and great imagery with a troubled protagonist. If I could change anything in this story I would make the protagonist less of a drunk as I believe it would have made her character stronger and it was nice having a female protagonist.

Thieves of Daring by Bill Willingham

This short story reminded me of some old Conan stories, whilst I was reading it. This is about a group of thieves/swordsmen who decide to steal from a magician's house, and pick up the story just as people are dying. I feel that we come into this story mid-way through the story and it ends with an open ending. I feel that this short story would work best as a chapter in a longer story.

The Fools Job by Joe Abercrombie

What a brilliant end to this anthology. I loved the humour, descriptive violence and enjoyable yet flawed characters in this short story. It is a perfect addition to this *Swords and Sorcery* anthology. A band on a mission, high in danger, with a sketchy plan with so much humour, I loved it. The story was brilliantly written in Abercrombie's unique style.

Felicia says

I really enjoy sword and sorcery, and some of my favorite authors contributed to this anthology, so it's win all over.

XX Sarah XX (former Nefarious Breeder of Murderous Crustaceans) says

[DUH (hide spoiler)]

Wealhtheow says

A collection of sword and sorcery stories. Mostly written by dudes, and mostly uninspired or poorly written. They're all quite stylized: these are clearly authors who have either developed their authorial voices or are aping other, very distinct voices.

I kinda enjoyed:

Steven Erikson, "Goats of Glory": A pitiful village is excited by the approach of a ragtag band of soldiers, but fully expects them all to die when they announce they'll be sleeping in the nearby haunted ruins. The combat writing is fierce and fun, with characterization aplenty and clarity in terms of who does what to whom. I didn't like anything outside of the fighting, though; the characters felt too self-consciously grim and blasé.

James Enge, "The Singing Spear": a famed Maker of magical items is faced with a difficult choice when one of his most powerful creations falls into the hands of a common highwayman.

KJ Parker's "A Rich Full Week": The stand-out of the collection, because it's such a refreshing and weird take on wizards, the undead, and magic in general. A wizard (who isn't a wizard, by his own standards, but a philosopher trained in mental energies) is called to a small village to settle the unquiet dead. But he finds that the undead that he faces was once a Brother of his own Order, which makes his job rather more complicated than expected. Creepy and spooky, with great description.

Scott Lynch's "In the Stacks": this story is why I picked the book up in the first place. I'm so desperate for more of Lynch's work! This story, in which wizards must venture into their school's magical library as their year-end test, is enjoyable but not nearly so much as his Gentlemen Bastards series. Still, the characters are unique and memorable (my personal favorite: Inappropriate Levity Bronzeclaw, a gigantic lizard named for his perceived character flaw, whose ability to bite people's heads off more than makes up for his mediocre wizardry) and the adventure is a fun read. Great, clever ending.

Caitlin Kiernan's "The Sea Troll's Daughter": Basically the first half of Beowulf, but with peasants instead of kings and a strong, brave, usually-drunk and very female Beowulf. I liked this particular remimaging better than most I've read. It has an earthy quality, with characters who read like humans instead of archetypes. (Also, it's a delight to read about queer heroes and monsters and tavern-maids.)

Joe Abercrombie's "The Fool Jobs": A band of mercenaries try to steal a magical item from a local village. The characters' voices and personalities are so distinct that they come clearly and memorably through after only a few pages. Not much in the way of plot, but I didn't miss it because I was too busy enjoying the characters and their banter.

I did not enjoy:

Glen Cook's "Tides Elba": the Black Company has an adventure. Maybe if I'd read a Black Company book before this I'd have appreciated seeing old characters again, but as it was this read like a badly done parody

of (quoting from the back cover here) "grim humor mixed with gritty violence." Over long, and the dialog consists entirely of each character trying to be wittily grim and failing.

Gene Wolfe's "Bloodsport": a cool concept paired with poor execution. Gladiators who portrayed chess pieces decide to maintain civilization when the empire that enslaved them starts to crumble. But the writing is in an overwrought style I dislike ("Above stands the All High, and below lies Pandemonium. Choose your road and keep to it, for if you stray from it, you may encounter such as I. Fare you well! We shall not meet again.")

CJ Cherryh's "A Wizard in Wiscezan": a young apprentice to a fading wizard is the only one who might be able to defeat a powerful dark wizard. This felt weirdly lightweight, like it was the prequel to Tewk&Willem's adventures and I was already supposed to care about them. Is that true? I dunno, but I just didn't feel invested in this story. I did like the magical maze the wizards hide in.

Garth Nix's "A suitable present for a sorcerous puppet": Another tale of Sir Hereward and Mister Fitz, who travel the world banishing gods. I actually quite like Hereward and Fitz, who have a comraderie reminiscent of Aubrey&Maturin, and Nix's magic systems are always fantastically innovative. Buuut this one just didn't capture me.

Time Lebbon's "The Deification of Dal Bamore" is actually really interesting, world-building-wise, but it's so relentlessly gory, and all the characters so unpleasant, that I found it tiring to get through. A priestess is tasked with escorting a magician (for magic is forbidden) to the wall to be publically executed.

Greg Keyes's "The Undefiled": A man is possessed by a serial-killing god. Generally, it makes his life (and the lives of those who encounter him) a living hell, but when he's tasked with retrieving a magical sword, his psychotic passenger proves to be his best defense. (view spoiler) Again, the idea is good but the writing is not. People are always grating out harsh chuckles and having lithe curves cloaked in shadow.

Michael Shea's "Hew the Tintmaster": an unmemorable quest, complete with artificially flowery dialog and descriptions that don't really make sense.

Tanith Lee's "Two Lions, a Witch, and the War-Robe": two wandering adventurers are tasked with finding the False Prince's missing war-robe. Told in a stiff, old-fashioned style rather like Malory's tales of Arthur. Just not to my taste.

Bill Willingham's "Thieves of Daring": This isn't a story, it's the first three pages of one. Such a rip-off.

So terrible:

Michael Moorcock's "Red Pearls: An Elric Story": so bad I started reading sections aloud to my partner so we could cackle together about it. I've never read an Elric story before; is Moorcock always so weirdly in love with him? Every page contains another seventeen descriptions of how beautiful his body is and how manly his brain and brawn. So many adjectives in so many run-on sentences! Here's a randomly chosen sample of the "extremely beautiful black-haired Princess Nauhaduar of Uyt" thinking about her lovah (which she does constantly): "...even if the albino were to abandon her, she would never regret knowing him or, as she suspected, loving him. Kinslayer and traitor he might be, it had never mattered to her what he was or what she risked. Dark and light were inextricably combined in this strange half-human creature whose ancestors had ruled the world before her own race emerged from the mud of creation, whose terrible sword, now rolled in rough cloth and skin and stowed in the lower locker, seemed possessed of its own dark intelligence. She knew she should be afraid of it, as of him, and part of her reexperienced the horror she had

already witnessed once, there in the forsts of mysterious Soom, but the rest of her was drawn by curiosity to know more about the sword's properties and the moody prince who carried it." A few randomly chosen descriptions of Elric *from a single paragraph*: "hard, wonderful pale and vibrant body," "his urgent, alien body" "the doomed prince of ruins" "the albino sorcerer". The whole thing is just too ridiculous and overwrought.

Robert Silverberg's "Dark Times at the Midnight Market": An aristocrat commissions a love potion from a down-on-his-luck magician. But then, after the love potion works, it is turned against the magician! It's not presented as a terrible, creepy story, but as a humorous twist. Hahah, rape is so clever and funny. >:(

Dan says

I've reviewed each section of this anthology on it's own merits, then gave my thoughts of the whole at the end.

Introduction: Check Your Dark Lord at the Door by Lou Anders and Jonathan Strahan: An intro this anthology that purports (as the title suggests) that this is a collection of new Sword & Sorcery, with a mix some classics. A claim I found highly dubious, though commendable. Nonetheless with names like Moorcock, Cook, Erikson and Abercrombie amongst the list I was really looking forward to a fun and varied anthology. Let's see how it fares.

Goats of Glory by Steven Erikson: This is one of the stories I was anticipating most. I am a fan of Erikson's work, at least what I have read, and he is a local boy so I like to give him the benefit of the doubt. Well I will say that the story has the aesthetics of Sword & Sorcery, at its basest. Swords, check, sorcery, check, booze, check, carousing, check, violence and gore, double check. What it lacks however is the introspection and dark imagery we glean from the masters of the genre like Howard's Conan, Moorcock's Elric, Wagner's Kane or Leiber's Fahfrd and the Gray Mouser. It is sorely missed. The prose was simple and without flourish. To me it felt like the story was missing its soul, its essence. Though not terrible by any means, it may be my least favourite of the collection. The anthology starts of on a weak foot... but sometimes it's better to start from the bottom anyway. What else do we have in store?

Tides Elba: A Tale of the Black Company by Glen Cook: Mr. Cook is another author I was quite looking forward to reading, as I had enjoyed The Black Company novel (though it has been a while). This story seems to be a direct prequel to his first novel in the Black Company series. I don't consider his work to be Sword & Sorcery, as it too does not quite have the same feel of the aforementioned authors, but it is dark fantasy. And this story delivered pretty much exactly what I had expected. A fast paced, violent and somewhat morally ambiguous story, with touches of dark humour.

Bloodsport by Gene Wolfe: This was an interesting story, unique amongst the bunch. Wolfe was an author, whom though familiar with, I had yet to read his works. I feel like this was a good introduction. Again not exactly Sword & Sorcery in the traditional sense (seeing a trend here?), but it does feature certain elements. The prose itself had a very old feel to it, a step removed from epics or medieval romances, and the story itself had some similarities to those kinds of tales too. It is a dark story with hints of romance, and an original idea that plays on an old classic game of strategy. Unlike Erikson story this one tended to have less of the aesthetic of Sword & Sorcery, but more of the feel. As the story features some dark imaginative ideas, and a bit of character introspection, but lacked much of the gore, violence or even sorcery.

The Singing Spear by James Enge: I'd never heard of James Enge before reading this anthology. And that's the beauty of a good anthology; reading works from familiar authors, exploring works of authors only heard of, and being introduced to new authors altogether. And I have to say this story, more so than any other (save perhaps Moorcock's Elric tale) is the epitome of Sword & Sorcery. Dark fantastic imagery, brooding introspective main characters, booze, swords, sorcery and violence. Most of all it's his prose, it hearkens to the masters of the genre. It reminded me most of Leiber's works, as opposed to say Howard, Wagner or Moorcock, as it has touches of humour throughout instead of a strictly serious plot. A fantastic new discovery.

A Wizard in Wiscezan by C.J. Cherryh: Like many of the authors on the list, and Cherryh being one of them, I was familiar with their works, but had yet to actually read anything by them. And this was an interesting inclusion in this anthology. The story felt markedly different than the rest of the stories, as does the way it's told and prose. Yet it doesn't strike me as wholly unique either. It has more of a high fantasy feel to it than previous entries in the anthology; a young boy learning to be a magician, set on a daunting task. Ultimately feels more like the beginning of a larger quest than a sole short story, and it makes me wonder if this is connected a larger work from C.J. Cherryh. Enjoyable and a good intro to her works, but it feels like it's just a small part of a much more epic whole.

A Rich Full Week by K.J. Parker: Another author I'd heard of, but hadn't yet read, though Parker specifically had really piqued my interest so I was quite excited to get to this tale. And I must say it was quite unique. Somewhat dark, yet humorous. The story revolves around a young priest (or something like one), the undead and some strange magicks. It's has a distinctly earthly feel to it, despite the subject matter. Parker's prose, though not necessarily florid has a certain wry charm to it that I quite enjoyed. And again, maybe not strictly Sword & Sorcery, but I feel like it's only maybe a step removed.

A Suitable Present for a Sorcerous Puppet by Garth Nix: Nix is another one those authors whom I'd heard of, but had yet to read. And this, I think, was a great introduction. This was a fun little story, different than others in the anthology, but more akin to traditional Sword & Sorcery than others, though perhaps not quite as dark. Like Cherryh's story I found this one had a feel of being part of a larger scope, like this story was just one amongst many. Though it felt like it was an instalment in a larger collection of similar instalments (think Conan collections) as opposed to Cherryh's which felt like a small section of one grand storyline.

Red Pearls: An Elric Story by Michael Moorcock: This is the story I had been looking forward to the most. One of the original propagators of Sword & Sorcery, Michael Moorcock has been one of, if not, my favourite authors for a long time. His Elric series instantly captured my imagination with his beautiful dark imagery and inventive stories and character. And this story easily lives up to his classics. It continues where Elric's story left off with Moorcock's beautiful prose, morally ambiguous (at best) main character, and twisting tales full of fast paced action. This time on an ill-fated journey to the world below, the underside of his own known world, to claim the White Sword. I may be biased, but this well could be the best instalment in this anthology (though one or two later ones give Moorcock a run for his money) and it, along with the aforementioned The Singing Spear, completely epitomize what Sword & Sorcery is.

The Deification of Dal Bamore: A Tale From Echo City by Tim Lebbon: This is one dark story. I mean really dark. Filled with gore, violence and torture. The main character is, at best, an anti-hero. The story has as much in common with splatterpunk horror as it does with dark fantasy and Sword & Sorcery fiction. And you know what? That's okay. I like this story. Very unique in its style and execution. I'd seen Lebbon's name bandied about a bit, like others, but never in relation to fantasy fiction, and I must say this caught my interest. Of the authors of old Sword & Sorcery the only one I would truly liken this work to would be Karl Edward Wagner, whose works were also unremittingly dark, though slightly less horrific. After this story

I'm interested in reading some of his longer fiction.

Dark Times at Midnight Market by Robert Silverberg: I don't really have much to say about this one. I appreciate Silverberg's contribution to the genre (sort of anyway) but I don't think that this story, part of the Majipoor chronicles, really fits with the collection. It felt more like he was added based on his name. The story is more of a sci-fi story than fantasy. Admittedly perhaps more in the science fantasy sort of style, as it does feature sorcery (that's half the battle, right?). But the story is just insipid and shallow too. Not my cup of tea. I will say I prefer his prose to Erikson's in the first instalment in this anthology, but at least Erikson's story felt like it had some thought and originality to it. This just felt like a throw away.

The UndeFILED by Greg Keyes: Keyes is another of the major authors in this anthology I had really been anticipating reading. And I wasn't disappointed. A suitably dark yet original story filled with violence and sorcery. The tone of prose felt distinctly modern, yet the subject matter and format (recurring characters on a new quest) hearkened to a more traditional Sword & Sorcery style. Like Nix's story it felt like this is part of a larger series of adventures. I feel like this story was a perfect example of "The new Sword & Sorcery" that the editors had been hoping for.

Hew The Tintmaster by Michael Shea: Like Silverberg's instalment this is somewhat of a science fantasy story. Unlike like Silverberg's story this one felt more fantastic, and was much more enjoyable. It is a bit of a pastiche of Jack Vance's Dying Earth series, though Cugel, Vance's character, mostly shows up as a cameo. Overall it was a fun adventure with an original plot and characters and fun execution. Shea's tone was reminiscent of an older style (which makes sense since he's been writing since the 70's) and definitely had a touch of Jack Vance to it. Beautiful imagery.

In the Stacks by Scott Lynch: This was another author and story I had been really looking forward to reading. First time exploring Lynch's works, and I must say... I was blown away. I found his style and subject matter somewhat reminiscent of Patrick Rothfuss, but perhaps even more fluid. The story about a group of young wizards on a quest to return books in a living library was fun, original and exciting. This is the only story, so far, that gave Red Pearls a run for its money. Though it's not really much like Sword & Sorcery, definitely more akin to high fantasy, but the quick pace and self-encapsulated story does have some similarities to the shorter works more common in S&S.

Two Lions, A Witch and a War-Robe by Tanith Lee: Though I have yet to read an full length stories of Lee's work, I have read a couple of her shorter works in various anthologies, and she never disappoints. Same goes for here. Like her works in other anthologies (even ones mostly dedicated to S&S) her works aren't exactly Sword & Sorcery, though this one is actually probably a step closer than others I have read from her. Swordplay, sorcery, booze and quests, pretty much spot one. Though not a terribly dark story compared to other S&S stories, or even most other stories in this anthology. The story itself starts out simple enough, but as it develops it takes a life of its own. The characters are really rather non-descript, but have a certain wit and charm that makes them enjoyable nonetheless. Add to the mix some fantastic wordplay for a title and we get another hit for Tanith Lee.

The Sea Troll's Daughter by Caitlin Kiernan: Like Lebbon I've mostly seen Kiernan's name associated with horror works. Unlike Lebbon it's normally associated more with weird works than the gorier splatterpunk side of horror. But also like Lebbon her fantasy fiction in this anthology is fresh, original, and very enjoyable. It checks off all the boxes for Sword & Sorcery, booze, carousing, violence, swords, sorcery (sort of), beautiful prose and dark imagery with a troubled protagonist. Yet it also hearkens to an older style, both in subject and execution, it is more reminiscent of Beowulf than Conan, and yet... with a distinctly feminine twist. Like Keyes story this is the new Sword & Sorcery that the editors were searching for.

Thieves of Daring by Bill Willingham: I am familiar with Bill's comic works, Fables and Shadowpact, and enjoyed what I'd read of both. But this was my first time reading his strictly written work. It's the shortest tale in the anthology, and as such doesn't get a lot of chance to develop, and feels somewhat cut short. Nonetheless this is a direct tribute to works from Leiber or Howard and was still a solid instalment in the anthology, if not wholly original.

The Fools Job by Joe Abercrombie: Saving best for last? Maybe. I have been a big Abercrombie kick recently. I just love his dark humor, descriptive violence and enjoyable yet flawed characters. And this shorter work hits all those marks, it also mostly hits all the pre-requisites for Sword & Sorcery, well at least it has the swords and the sorcery... Actually it reminded me most of Glen Cook's works. A band on a mission, high in danger, low in details. There is a couple references to some of Abercrombie's other characters, but mostly this story is completely self-contained. A great way to finish off this anthology.

Now for my thoughts overall. Did this anthology succeed in achieving what the editors set out to do? Not really. We discover some new Sword & Sorcery styled stories and authors, and we do get the chance to revisit some classic authors of the genre (or at least on the peripheries of the genre, like Wolfe or Silverberg). But a lot of it is simply not Sword & Sorcery, or has little to do with its progenitors. Had it been titled New Heroic Fantasy, I would have said that the editors knocked it out of the park in that respect, as undoubtedly that's what nearly all these stories are. But what really matters to me is if it was enjoyable. And that it was. And you know what? I'm kind of happy it wasn't all strictly Leiber, Howard and Moorcock clones, I prefer to have some variety. Even when looking back at older anthologies in the genre, like Swords Against Darkness or Flashing Swords!, many of the best works within were not simple Conan clones, like those of say Lin Carter or Andrew Offut, but instead it was the more unique works like those of Tanith Lee and Charles De Lint or authors venturing beyond their comfort zones like Ramsey Campbell or Brian Lumley.

4.5/5

MrsJoseph says

<http://bookslifewine.com/swords-dark-...>

2.5 stars rounded down to 2 stars!

I have to think about this one. My original read was compared to [older] readings of MZBs Sword & Sorceress anthology - which is how I was lead to Fantasy - and it was a let down in comparison.

Now that all of my MZB reads have been tainted with the knowledge of what a horrible person she was, I *want* to say that the anthology should be free from her taint. She was not the author, she was the editor.

I want to say that - which would keep the rating/review for THIS anthology the same. But I have a terrible feeling that [an unwanted re-read] would increase this book's rating. By at least a .5 star.

Karl says

This is copy 102 of 500 signed and numbered copies.

Stephen says

A decidedly **non-Tolkienesque** collection of sorcery, swords and **morally challenged** heroes characters **roughly** moving through bleak, **dreary** landscapes and encountering death, violence and other sordid **nastiness**. This is MY kind of fantasy (i.e., the **unkind** variety).

Within these **unhallowed** pages, you will find **no** hairy-footed **hobbits** smoking pipe-weed; **no** pompous, effeminate **Elves** residing in trees and baking bread; and **no** melancholy **kings** proclaiming in Shakespearean patois.

You must look elsewhere for those.

This is all grim, **moorcockian** anti-heroes and gritty world's that have bloomed from the fertile soil of the likes of Anderson's The Broken Sword. This is the dark side of fantasy...and it lights up my happy so much more than the fluffy fantasists like Jordan and Brooks ever could.

As with most anthologies, the quality level is not uniform and there are some stories that didn't exactly stir my joystick. Ironically, several of these less than inspiring tales were the product of the more established contributors. For example, *Tanith Lee's* punny "Two Lions, A Witch And The War-Robe" is limp and lifeless and *Glen Cook's* Black Company story, "Tides Elbe," felt like it was intended to fill out the page count of the collection and left me bored and drowsy.

However, there were far more standouts than washouts and I found a number of absolute gems in this collection. Here are my favorites, each of which get an easy 5 stars from me:

THE CROP'S CREAM:

- "**In the Stacks**" by *Scott Lynch*: Simply brilliant. Dark but whimsical and tension-filled but funny, this story concerns a young wizard and a brutal final exam involving a unique library containing **millions** of magical books. These grimoires are semi-sentient and the power they contain can "leak" from the pages making the library a wondrous but treacherous place to visit. This is a superbly delicious piece of writing that further cements my opinion of Lynch as one of the best writers in the business right now. Now if only he would finish the next Locke Lamora novel.

- "**Fools Job**" by *Joe Abercrombie*: This guy apparently can do no wrong in my eyes as he has spun another master-piece of gray morality, black humor and buckets full of the red liquid of life. This twisted, funny tale is set in the same world as Abercrombie's other novels and introduces characters that make their presence felt in The Heroes. You could call it a prequel of sorts and it is an ass kicker.

- "**The Undefiled**" by *Greg Keyes*: Despite my enormous love for the stories by Lynch and Abercrombie, this may be my favorite of the whole collection. It is easily the darkest and most disturbing tale in the anthology. Bleak and deeply moving, this story burrowed into my brain and has stayed there more than any other. This is subversive fantasy at its best.

- "**The Deification of Dal Bamore**" by *Tim Lebbon*: This story introduces the world of his novel Echo City and is another dark slice of awesome. Wonderful, unique world-building and a terrific magic system. This

was my first encounter with Tim Lebbon and I look forward to reading more of his work.

- **"Goats of Glory"** by *Steven Erikson*: in the running for best story in the collection, this story is similar in style and tone to Joe Abercrombie's piece. While Joe, in my opinion, has superior prose chops, Erikson shows he can be his equal in story-telling as this is a humdinger involving a group of veteran soldiers spending the night in a "not so abandoned" castle. Here is the opening paragraph:

Five riders drew rein in the pass. Slumped in their saddles, they studied the valley sprawled out below them. A narrow river cut a jagged scar down the middle of a broad floodplain. A weathered wooden bridge sagged across the narrow span, and beyond it squatted a score of buildings, gray as the dust hovering above the dirt tracks wending between them.

Great characters, great action and a jaw-dropping gut shot of an ending.

- **"A Rich Full Week"** by *K.J. Parker*: I loved this. An unusual piece that takes a fresh, unique look at the **zombie** mythos. Sad and moving and terrific.

- **"Hew the Tintmaster"** by *Michael Shea*: a great sorbet of lighter, more humorous fare, this story takes place in Jack Vance's Dying Earth and features everyone's favorite scoundrel, Cugel the Clever (though in a supporting role). Shea does a great job bringing a Vancian style and tone to his story and this was a lot of fun. I won't spoil the reveal, but it has a very important place in the Dying Earth canon.

The rest of the pieces are at least three stars worthy of reading with 4 stars worth of honorable mention going to "Red Pearls" by *Michael Moorcock* (an Elric tale) and "Dark Times at the Midnight Market" by *Robert Silverberg* (a Majipoor tale).

Overall, a thoroughly enjoyable collection of scarred men, brutal magics and perverse and pervasive nastiness. Me likes.

4.0 stars. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!!**

Mark says

When the back of the cover says 'Seventeen Original Tales of Sword and Sorcery penned by Masters Old and New' and then goes on to mention Glen Cook and the Black Company, Michael Moorcock and Elric,

Steven Erikson and Malazan, Gene Wolfe, Robert Silverberg and Majipoor, KJ Parker, Scott Lynch, Joe Abercrombie and others, most readers would need little persuading to pick this one up.

Furthermore, when the two editors are known as a couple of the best in the business currently, you would expect a healthy selection of the best tales from the best.

Consequently, the beginning boded well. Their introduction to *Sword and Sorcery* is well written and informative, pointing out the origins of the subgenre and the current re-emergence of interest in it.

So far, so good. However, having eagerly sat down to read the actual stories, it was a different reaction. The first three stories in the collection – by Erikson, Cook and Wolfe respectively – were extremely disappointing, to the point where I seriously thought I had made a major mistake in reading it.

However, the fourth, by James Enge, was an improvement and the next by stalwart CJ Cherryh began to make me feel happier. Things started to look better. KJ Parker’s tale was a joy and Moorcock’s Elric was a triumph. Halfway through the book I was feeling much happier, though there were still stories that left me unimpressed. By the end I was glad I had read it, though it was not the triumph of the genre I had hoped it was going to be when I started.

The nature of story collections is that there are bound to be stories that you like better than others. Usually though I can say whether I liked the collection or not. Silverberg’s *Legends*, for example, published in 1998, and its sequel *Legends II* (2003) had the same intent as this, to showcase the best Fantasy and had some unusual yet interesting choices that made me read more of some authors I had not read.

Here, with the same aim, there were no authors I had not encountered before and all of whom previously I would’ve said were good, but the overriding cumulative impression in the end here is much less positive.

What worried me most is that this book was not the book I had hoped would be definitive. I was hoping that this was the one that would allow me to say to others, ‘*Here you are. This is the book that tells you why I read Fantasy. It is a collection of great stories from some of the best writers in the field today. Read it and you will want to read more.*’ It should’ve been, but isn’t.

There are stories there I liked, for a variety of reasons. It was wonderful to revisit old favourites such as Elric and Majipoor, it was also great to read tales from some of the new – Scott Lynch’s tale of a magical library gone awry was great, so too Joe Abercrombie’s *The Fool Jobs* (which augurs well for the new book soon) – but there were far too many that, despite me wanting to like them, left me feeling at the end that I had wasted my time.

A curate’s egg then, and, for me, a disappointingly uneven read. There is a lot to like, but you may not find the journey totally acceptable.

Having said that, Rob Bedford reviewing for the *Sacramento/ San Francisco Book Review* liked it.

Think this may be one that divides readers. I’m going to be interested in reading what others think.
