



## Gemini Cell

*Myke Cole*

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**Gemini Cell** Myke Cole

**Myke Cole continues to blow the military fantasy genre wide open with an all-new epic adventure in his highly acclaimed Shadow Ops universe—set in the early days of the Great Reawakening, when magic first returns to the world and order begins to unravel...**

US Navy SEAL Jim Schweitzer is a consummate professional, a fierce warrior, and a hard man to kill. But when he sees something he was never meant to see on a covert mission gone bad, he finds himself—and his family—in the crosshairs. Nothing means more to Jim than protecting his loved ones, but when the enemy brings the battle to his front door, he is overwhelmed and taken down.

That should be the end of the story. But Jim is raised from the dead by a sorcerer and recruited by a top secret unit dabbling in the occult, known only as the Gemini Cell. With powers he doesn't understand, Jim is called back to duty—as the ultimate warrior. As he wrestles with a literal inner demon, Jim realizes his new superiors are determined to use him for their own ends and keep him in the dark—especially about the fates of his wife and son...

## Gemini Cell Details

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## From Reader Review Gemini Cell for online ebook

### Michael Fletcher says

Someone told me this book was military SF and that's not really my thing (I don't hate it, it's just not what I reach for first) but then I discovered I was going to be on a panel at NYCC with Myke Cole and thought I'd better read one of his books so I had at least some idea what he was about.

First, this ain't military SF. It's...I dunno...military science fantasy. There's a science fiction element to be sure, but the story is more deeply routed in the fantastic. And GAWDAMN it's good.

Tanks and sorcery and high-power rifles and demon-possessed undead.

Now I have to read the rest of the Shadow Ops series.

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### Carly says

The Reawakening--the rebirth of magic in the modern world--has begun, but the world is still pushing the snooze button.

Jim Schweitzer has his feet planted in the nonmagical world. He has a nice home, a four-year-old son, and a wife whose art career is beginning to blossom. He also kills people. Professionally. But when an assignment goes terribly wrong, Schweitzer's life takes a turn for the weird. Suddenly, he finds himself in a world where death is no longer the end and where magic is a contagion that the U.S. government is determined to stop.

In general, I'm not particularly fond of prequels. They tend to tell a story whose outlines have already been sketched in the "real" book, and most of the suspense is killed by the author's need to paint within the lines, both in terms of plot and characters. However, Gemini Cell is definitely an exception. It takes place long before the events of Shadow Ops, Cole's other series in the same world. While Schweitzer runs into Shadow Ops magics such as Renders, Cole also introduces jinns: human spirits that can reanimate corpses and co-inhabit with the original soul. Gemini Cell takes place during the birth of the Supernatural Operations Corps, before magic is acknowledged, before the terms of "Latents" and "Probes" and "Selfers" have come into usage. But at the same time, elements of the future are present. From the government's initial reaction to magic, the writing is on the wall. The big question of the Shadow Ops series is the balance between freedom and security, and that struggle begins in Gemini Cell.

I originally became interested in Cole after reading his blog post on PTSD. This is, finally, the PTSD book. Several of the characters go through traumatic experiences that leave them hypervigilant, unable to find safety or reassurance in the world they find themselves thrown back into. There are also several beautiful descriptions of loss from characters consumed by grief:

"She'd stopped going to the gym, whiled away the hours in front of her laptop, scanning emails she couldn't bring herself to answer, watching her social media scroll by, a flowing current of a world that kept on turning as if nothing had happened, as if her life hadn't been suddenly

snatched away from her, crumbled into a lumpen ball, and handed back with a note attached that read, FIGURE THIS OUT. GOOD LUCK!"

Characterization in Gemini Cell is much stronger than in any of the Shadow Ops books. Sarah, Schweitzer's wife, is the most rounded and interesting female character that Cole has written thus far. At the same time, Gemini Cell kicks the graphic imagery and violence up about ten clicks. The horrific scenes were intensified by Schweitzer's own nature. I couldn't come to grips with the idea of a man seeing killing as a job or an art form, and found his belief that passionless professionalism somehow made his role more acceptable to be profoundly disturbing. Yet although he has the same worryingly rock-hard moral certainty as Cole's other protagonist, Oscar Britton, I found him more likeable, even though I wasn't sure I actually wanted to like him.

Schweitzer thinks of himself as a warrior, a "paladin" whose wars are "sanctified." Although it isn't really explored in this book, I strongly suspect that later books will examine and challenge who is doing the sanctification, and how noble their motives really are. Schweitzer sees his cause as righteous, but he is also driven by a deep-seated desire to be special, someone his wife can admire and his son can look up to. As Schweitzer's world is turned on its end, even he begins to wonder about his own nature. He is a weapon, but is he merely a tool, or something more? He fixes even more firmly upon his identity as a "warrior" and an artist of death:

"It was in the killing that the SEAL distinguished himself from the enemy. Schweitzer killed with a professional's precision, a cold calculation made holy by its service to his country's cause. It was what made him an artist instead of a thug."

Personally, I don't understand why "professionalism" somehow improves the "killing" bit. How does killing efficiently make him less of a killer? A trigger man? A murderer? Schweitzer's definitions of "right" and "wrong" are certainly not mine, but that made the book all the more interesting to read. One of the things I like about Cole is the unreliability of the third-person narrators. Even if Schweitzer is currently assured in his own righteousness, that won't stop the rest of the series from turning his beliefs upside down. This is hinted at in one of my favourite scenes:

"Why do you call them bad guys?" she'd asked.  
"Because they're bad." [...]  
"Do you really believe that?"  
"Sure. Sometimes. No. It doesn't matter. We have to think that."  
"Why?" He felt her head shift, knew she was looking at him now.  
"Because you can't do the job if you're thinking about their mothers, or their kids. You'll choke up. You'll get yourself killed. You'll get your teammates killed."  
"I don't believe in bad guys."  
"Huh?"  
"I don't think there's such a thing as evil. Some people are crazy. Others are terrified. Others are stupid or too proud to reverse what they know is a bad course. Nobody's evil. Not in a mustache-twirling way."  
"It doesn't matter."  
"It does matter."  
"No, sweetheart. It doesn't. The scalpel isn't the hand that moves it. You can't be both the hand and the blade, Sarah. That's how you get juntas. I don't worry about the nature of evil. There are no good guys or bad guys. There's only alive or dead. Mission objectives accomplished or failed."

If you're interested in trying Myke Cole and looking for a place to start, then Gemini Cell is the book for you. While it contains much more graphic violence than any other book so far, I think it also is a stronger novel than the start of the Shadow Ops series. I found Schweitzer's predicament to be especially interesting in light of the events of Shadow Ops, but I also think the book stands on its own, without any dependencies on other works. The story weaves in elements of thriller, fantasy, and even romance, and ties it together with some troubling questions about our world and our system. I can't wait to see where it goes next.

*\*\*Note: this review is of an uncorrected advanced reader copy. While the included quotes may not reflect the final phrasing, I believe they speak to the nature of the novel as a whole.\*\**

**Excerpted from my review on BookLikes, which contains additional quotes and spoilers that I was too lazy to copy over.**

*~~I received this ebook from the publisher, Penguin, in exchange for my honest review. Thank you!~~*

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### **Justin says**

This is Myke Cole's best book to date, and it's really not close. He's improving by leaps and bounds with each novel. For those of you who haven't tried him yet, this is a great place to start.

It's set ostensibly in the same world as his previous novels, but you wouldn't really know it. It feels like a whole new series, with a whole new set of characters. There's a fantastic romance to the novel, and a boat load of pulse pounding action.

Honestly, if you've been thinking about reading Myke Cole, do yourself a favor and make it this one.

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### **Mark Lawrence says**

Myke Cole's a nice guy but with one huge character flaw ... the thing I really hate about him is the way each book he writes is better than the last by a fair margin. That kind of thing gets really irritating by book #4.

Anyway. This book is set before his Shadow Ops trilogy at a time when magic is just starting to creep into the world and very few people know about it.

As in the previous books our protagonist is a military man. In this case the most hardcore to date, being a special ops guy. The expectation perhaps, being that our hero is a hard case bristling with weaponry and there's kick-ass magic waiting in the wings, is that this will be a shallow adrenaline-filled explode-'em up. And it's true, a lot of weaponry is discharged and cars are tossed left and right with super-powers. Not for nothing did Peter V Brett invoke the combination of Black Hawk Down and X-Men when describing the earlier books.

\_However\_ putting aside all the adrenaline-filled exploding ... Myke Cole writes great characters, he catches the subtleties of relationships and brings his people to life in a way that really makes you care if the burning engine fragments hit them or not. Seriously, you could subtract the chaos and have a good story just about people here.

The combination is compelling stuff.

There's no requirement to read the earlier books first. Start here no problem. You'll want to read them after but you'll miss nothing - it's a wholly self contained start to something new.

Sex, violence, feels, good writing ... it's all here. Read it.

Join my 3-emails-a-year newsletter #prizes

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### **Alex Ristea says**

You really can't get much better if you're looking for military fiction.

Myke Cole's background shine through, but not in a braggadocio manner. It's not "hey look at me and all I know!" so much as an acknowledgement that informs the writing. I like that it wasn't just on the technical side of weapons and tactics (though that was awesome), but Myke dives into the psychology of warfare. Without going too deep into spoilers, there are some interesting parallels between modern and ancient warfare.

You can't help but think how introspective this novel is, but if you're a fan of Myke's non-fiction writing on PTSD and related topics, I reckon this will be right up your alley.

This is a fast and fun (and funny!) novel that should appeal to new fans. I will be honest here (and hope that Myke doesn't kick my ass) in saying that I tried reading Control Point and couldn't finish it. This one? Much, much better. Myke has found his stride, and I think he's an author we all need to have on our immediate pul lists.

There were a few issues I had with the overall pace and the finish, but otherwise recommended if you want a solid book focussing on the military.

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### **Becky says**

Its 4 a.m. and I cant sleep because this is rolling over and over in my head, so I am updating my review. Its because this book is different and important and there are very specific reasons why:

I had a friend named Mike. We hung out in college because we had all the same history classes and together we sponsored study groups and essay rewrites for students that were struggling. We both came from military backgrounds, I was enlisted in the reserves at the time and he was in ROTC. When he graduated we kept in touch. The guy was HILARIOUS. We weren't best friends or anything but we were decent penpals. We geeked out about the same things, we were über nerds in the military and there just aren't a ton of those, and we both had crazy plans for sleeve tattoos (he actually got his). Initially he had wanted to be a chaplain but

decided to become a military police officer instead, did a few tours, pinned O3 and was home for a spell.

They found him when he didn't show up for work. When we first found out that Mike was dead there were rumors that it had been an accident cleaning his gun. In the middle of work, I just started crying, I knew that no one that had grown up hunting, that was a military officer, hell, a military \*police\* officer would make that mistake. It was ruled a suicide a few days later.

Its been years. I still choke up. I see these hilarious mashups of lord of the rings and ghostbusters or dune and I know he would love it. Sometimes I still send him facebook messages because its how I cope. Mostly I am still angry. Im angry that I missed something. That his unit missed something. How many fucking systems had to fail for him.

He isn't my only friend I've lost to suicide but its the one that hurts the most, the one that shocked me the most. I always expect nerds to be more hopeful. We grew up on story after story about heroes slaying the monsters, overcoming, and then so often receiving their happily ever after. In real life, things have a price. When you see that monster in yourself, when you convince yourself that you are the monster? Well, there are a lot less stories about that. There are less stories about living with yourself afterwards. You don't hear how the heroes duck at loud noises, get painful adrenaline rushes from a smell, have to take entirely different routes home because they saw a weird box on the side of the road and they just couldn't drive.past.it.

And that's why Gemini Cell is important. It isn't just a paranormal fantasy book (although its really good at that too). Its a real story about the costs that people pay. Its about PTSD. Its about trying to come home and live again in a world that continued to spin while you were away. Its about losing the story you tell about yourself, what you think makes you "you", and having to build a new one. Cole wrote a world that is raw with the reality of trauma-survivors... but its also hopeful, it tells a story that so many people need.

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Original Review below

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My audible life really revolves around escapism right now, thank god I've been saving up all these scifi/fantasy books for when the mood struck.

TBF I have not yet read the first trilogy set in this world where magic is waking back up. I started listening to this near Halloween and the plot just seemed more seasonally appropriate. I love this so much that I am definitely going to have to go back and listen to the original trilogy after I finish this one.

Cole brings the best military realism of any fiction work I've read while still managing to give it an update to fit the setting for the novel. The action is fast-paced with a clarity of movement that is hard to find in other books. You never get lost in the combat, which has an interesting symmetry to the concurrent story of Sarah and her grief. Also, the writing surrounding Sarah, her PTSD, and grief is astounding. Its real and its raw and I've seen it and Cole perfectly encapsulates it. Really Jim's story is another level of the story of PTSD- a world moving on without you, how much of your rage you choose/learn to live with when you return home, how you process your emotions and information.

A great book! Can't wait for my next audible credit to continue the series.

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## Timothy Ward says

Myke Cole is famous for writing military fantasy, focusing on magically enhanced soldiers in modern day. I love just about everything about what he did with this book. The main focus is on a Navy Seal and his inner battle between doing the job he is best at and being the husband and father who can enjoy his family and not put them at risk. As far as that emotional battle goes, Myke completely nailed it. It was hard to keep reading at times because it was so painful to endure the main character's heart struggle. That also meant I had to finish the story, though, so that's a good thing. I'm a little confused about the ending, but this is only the first book in the series so maybe the last page will be explained more in the next book.

The next thing Myke did well was taking the magical supersoldier idea, adding the jinn twist, which is something I've yet to see as a magic based system, and then really drive the power/weakness battle. At times it felt a little much when the character was stuck in prison or even out on the field, the back and forth became a little tiring. The action became a little tiring as well, but in the end Myke did well resolving the back and forth with a surprise.

Great read that only gets knocked from a five to a four star because of the scenes where the action and jinn back and forth went on for a little too long. The main heart of the story is the main character and his family, and because he's not with them for most of the middle-to-end, I had a chunk that I had to push through to get to the resolution. Other than that, many elements in this story are top notch and therefore makes this a high recommendation.

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## William says

Zombie macho testosterone soldiers. Not what I expected. The action sequences are pretty good, but it's just unrelentingly macho.

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## Rob says

**Executive Summary:** This one wasn't quite as good as I was hoping, but good enough that I'll continue on with the series later this year before the third book is released.

**Audiobook:** Korey Jackson does another great job with the audio. This series is the only thing I've heard him narrate, but he's got a great voice for military fiction.

### Full Review

I'm in the middle of like 20+ series. I enjoyed the original trilogy of this series, but I wasn't exactly itching to jump into the prequel series. I decided I'd wait a bit until this new trilogy was closer to completion.

Unfortunately, I didn't enjoy this one quite as much as I'd hoped. It's not a bad book, but after his last two books, my hopes were a bit higher. I probably liked it more than Control Point, but I found it a tough listen and slow going at times.

I'll start with the positives: I found Jim Schweitzer far more likable from the start than Oscar Britton. The other new characters, especially his wife were all pretty good as well. I also think the quality of Mr. Cole's writing has improved with every book. Additionally I really like the world that he has created.

That said, I was pretty bored for awhile. The struggle between Schweitzer and the Jinn was, well tedious. The book felt like a lot of setup. I think he wanted to make this book an entry point for new readers, and not just a prequel for those of us who read the original trilogy.

I'm tired of comic book movies constantly doing origin stories, and I think some of that carries over here. I already knew a lot of the details of the world. I would have liked to see Schweitzer interact with the world more, and learn more of the backstory of the conflicts of the original trilogy rather than so much time being spent on Schweitzer's own particular struggles.

I thought the ending was much stronger than the rest of the book, and it gives me hope that I'll enjoy Javelin Rain more than this one, much I like I did with Fortress Frontier.

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## Peter says

So it's pretty well known in the SF community that Myke Cole and I have been friends for a long time. We met in high school back in 1990, which is... shit. 25 years ago now.

Wow. I feel old.

Myke and I have a long and sordid history including Dungeons & Dragons, head-shaving and podcasts.

We also have a long history of creative support. I say with all honesty that I would likely not be a professional author without the countless hours of soundboarding, encouragement and advice he has given me. Even *Skull Throne*, my upcoming Demon Cycle novel, has a few distinct Cole fingerprints on it.

I say this for full disclosure of bias, but this does not change the fact I speak honest word when I tell you that **GEMINI CELL IS ON SALE TODAY AND YOU SHOULD TOTALLY BUY IT BECAUSE IT IS AWESOME.**

While technically set in Cole's *Shadow Ops* universe, *Gemini Cell* tales place many years before the other books, when the return of magic to our world is in its infancy and the rules are different. It's a great place for readers who have never tried Cole before to jump on without any need for knowledge of the other books.

For those who have read Myke's books before, don't think for a moment you've seen all his tricks. Myke is one of the rare authors out there who gets better with each successive novel, even while maintaining the book-a-year schedule I have always felt was out of my reach. There is no harder working author out there, and Myke deserves every success.

Like his other books, *Gemini Cell* has muscle-clenching action scenes influenced in no small part by Cole's real-life military combat experience, but also a deep exploration of character, giving us a warrior whose love for his family and country transcend even death.

Urban fantasy. Military SF. Zombie Romance. Black Hawk Down Meets the X-Men. Call it what you will,

*Gemini Cell* is a waterslide of awesome that pulls you down fast and ends with a splash.

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## **Milo (BOK) says**

The Review: <http://thefictionalhangout.blogspot.c....>

*Myke Cole continues to blow the military fantasy genre wide open with an all-new epic adventure in his highly acclaimed Shadow Ops universe—set in the early days of the Great Reawakening, when magic first returns to the world and order begins to unravel...*

*US Navy SEAL Jim Schweitzer is a consummate professional, a fierce warrior, and a hard man to kill. But when he sees something he was never meant to see on a covert mission gone bad, he finds himself—and his family—in the crosshairs. Nothing means more to Jim than protecting his loved ones, but when the enemy brings the battle to his front door, he is overwhelmed and taken down.*

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Myke Cole's Shadow Ops trilogy was one of my favourites of the last few years and had an excellent finale that really worked. The combination of military and urban fantasy in a modern day setting and the exploration of a variety of interesting, compelling characters really worked and established Cole as an author to watch for sure. Control Point, Fortress Frontier and Breach Zone were excellent novels and even though Gemini Cell may not feature the same characters and take place a few years before the main story, I was hooked from the get go once again, with Cole knocking it out of the park.

I'd like to kick off this review by bringing your attention to the cover. It looks awesome, doesn't it? Myke Cole's UK Covers have always been excellent but personally, for me, Gemini Cell is the strongest looking one yet and it just really gives that extra awesome feel to the book that screams "read me now". So naturally, when I brought this book to read during the last week which I spent mostly in Spain, It didn't take me long to get stuck in and once I did I couldn't put it down. It's just that good, and if you've enjoyed the previous novels, then you'll certainly find that Gemini Cell will once more be something that you should really enjoy.

With the early days of the Great Reawakening used as a backdrop, Cole introduces us to US Navy Seal Jim Schweitzer. He's a family man, and good at his job. Against normal threats, he's hard to kill. However, when he sees something that he shouldn't on a mission, he's brought down and killed. Now, normally, that would be the end for Jim, however, he's brought back, resurrected by a sorcerer and recruited for a top secret unit specialised for dealing with occult problems, called Gemini Cell. Nobody can know that they exist. However, as Jim soon discovers, his own superiors aren't exactly the most trustworthy people on the planet, making things a lot more complicated than they were originally.

If you've never tried Cole's novels before, you can jump on here and feel right at home. The rules of magic aren't quite the same as what they would be further down the line, and all the characters are different as well, so you won't be lost with overarching continuity, with the characters featured here being just as new to someone who will have read all of Cole's books as they will be to someone trying his work for the first time.

It makes the book feel fresh and exciting, and also allows for unpredictability, which isn't really the case with prequels that feature the characters that you already know and love.

Once again, Black Hawk Down meets the X-Men is a more than appropriate comparison used to describe Cole's work. If you like those two, then chances are, much like with the other books, you'll love this. There's enough here to make it feel both as though it's set in the same universe but also can stand on its own as an individual work, and as a result there's no reason why anybody who loved the first trilogy should be put off by this latest offering.

The character development is paid as much attention to as the action and this is great to see, with Jim Schweitzer really being a character that gets fleshed out well. It's interesting to see what happens to him when he gets thrown out of his depth and he works as a pretty compelling character for readers to follow over the course of the book.

Gemini Cell is another winner from Cole and serves as a successful prequel that doesn't disappoint. I never did make a 'most anticipated' list for 2015 but this title would most certainly be near the top. And because it turned out to be as good as it was, Gemini Cell is probably going to end up at the top when that list turns into a 'best of' 2015 as well.

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**VERDICT:** 9/10

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### **Bradley says**

Here's a neat trick and no bones or grafted body parts about it: Cole's writing is improving by leaps and bounds with each book.

The novel starts with a lot of great gory action perfect for all you special-forces fans with a hankering for a huge kill-count. I'll be honest, however. It took a while before the strange finally kicked in and before we got the magic, the jinn, the undead, and all sorts of nasty feral flesh crafting, but it was quite worth it.

Don't assume this is a normal UF, though, it's Fantasy-Military fiction, and our main character has ALL of these little elements within just little old him. :)

More than all the other novels that Cole has written, this one is the most character-driven, focusing more on family and his relationship with his wife, and also there's a lot of PoV from her, too. There's a lot of buildup, discovery, confusion, and development. I might say, firmly, that this is the novel's main strength. Or maybe that strength is tied with all the gory goodness that goes on between all the character developments. :)

This can be considered a distant prequel to his other novels, all early days of magic and full of deep-cover ops... preferably head wraps to hide the cadaver stare, actually. :)

Quite good. Quite fun. Still popcorn fiction, but there's a definite trend toward deeper goodness going on here. This time we've got some VERY interesting PTSD. :)

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## Kelly says

The movie *Lone Survivor* was my introduction to what a U.S. Navy SEAL is. Before then, I had a vague idea they were something like Marines in wetsuits. I realise I'm denting my own credibility here, but not all of us know everything there is to know about every branch of the military and there is so much misinformation out there in fiction and movies. The film begins with a look at the training a SEAL must go through in order to get their pin. It's...insane. It really is. The rest of the film clearly demonstrates why that insanity is necessary, however, and these were the men I had in my head when I picked up *Gemini Cell* by Myke Cole.

Jim Schweitzer is a Navy SEAL. When a mission goes south, he doesn't just duck and cover. He pushes through to complete his objective, regardless of the cost – which could have been the life of his best friend and brother in the SEALs – all for a container of dead bodies that get torn up in the crossfire. Questions follow him home where his wife makes it clear she's less than supportive of his career. He's always gone and could be gone again, anytime. All it would take is a phone call.

When the mission follows Schweitzer home, the consequences are dire. In an attempt to protect his family, he is cut down in a scene that is so brutal, I actually held my breath while reading. But that's not the end of the story. Having already read the first three novels of Myke Cole's Shadow Ops series I already knew there was magic in this world. *Gemini Cell* serves as a prequel, so I was expecting Schweitzer's death to be short-lived. It is. Returned to his reanimated body by a sorcerer, Schweitzer begins his second 'life' with a neighbour, a jinn who will share his skin. Ninip is the soul of an ancient warrior that has been plucked from the void. Together, they will control Schweitzer's patched up body. Together, they will continue to serve their country as a new type of soldier, as part of the experimental program known as the Gemini Cell.

Schweitzer soon proves that the tenacity that earned him his SEAL pin is what separates him from the other operators in the Cell. His battle for dominance of his body continues long after others have succumbed to the power of the jinn tethering them to not-death. These other operators end up properly dead or caged, used like rabid dogs on missions where subtlety is unnecessary. Schweitzer's battle isn't only physical, however. He and Ninip clash intellectually over what it is to be a soldier and a warrior. Their ideas on honour differ, as does their take on operational procedure. This facet of the book: Schweitzer's examination of self and the comparison between a warrior of old and a modern soldier, a modern army, is deeply thoughtful and delightfully chewy. In a book of extremes, the battle between life and death, love and honour, this is the middle ground. What ties it all together and makes the mission, any mission, worthwhile.

There is plenty of action, though. Schweitzer is sent on missions as mysterious as the one that got him killed and each provides a clue to the puzzle of his existence and the tragedy that befell his family. But it's the information he doesn't have that will force him to take control of his not-death.

Myke Cole's books are an intriguing mix of fantasy and military fiction. They read like science fiction set on an alternate version of our planet where magic is flowing back into the world. There are several things to love about this setting. One is the magic, itself. This isn't a quasi-medieval world where magic replaces science. This is a world like ours, where any of us might wake up one day only to discover we can set fire to the cat. Er, breakfast. What would you do with that sort of power? Cole explores this dynamic thoughtfully and realistically. I find the fact the US Military immediately creates a unit for magically endowed soldiers amusing. It's also a rather fatalistic, yet forward-thinking view. Honestly, who knows how we would respond to spontaneous cat barbecues or actual zombies serving in the armed forces. It's an interesting quandary and one he explores thoroughly in all the books.

It's not all operational procedure. Each book has a good dose of action and intrigue. They're subtitled 'Shadow Ops' after all. The covers are adorned with soldiers in body armour. Truth in advertising.

I also love Cole's characters. They're very human, despite their abilities. Flawed and prone to second-guessing themselves. Not always the best operators, but always honourable. That's a mix I like. Finally, not all his heroes are men. In *Gemini Cell*, there are female Navy SEALs! One of them is chief and she's not overly feminized or masculinised. She just is who she is and that's true for all the women who feature in Cole's books. They're good, evil, nice, nasty, solid operators and doubting sorcerers. As a dedicated science fiction reader who just happens to be female, I appreciate the balance.

It's tempting to say *Gemini Cell* is Cole's best book so far, and it is outstanding. But Breach Zone, the third book of the Shadow Ops trilogy, is my favourite so far, probably because it was the grand finale for a great plot arc. Here, we're just getting started. *Gemini Cell* is different sort of story, though and I kind of expected that. Every book Cole writes is different. We're not being told the same story over and over or even the same story from a different point of view.

It's obvious Myke Cole hasn't finished exploring his world and there really is room for a lot of new angles. The story might begin with *Gemini Cell*, but I hope it doesn't end here.

Written for SFCrownsnest.

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### **Jim says**

What was I thinking? For some reason I thought I'd like this & yet it was exactly the kind of macho garbage I detest & I know I detest it. At least they didn't give a paragraph description of every weapon, but otherwise it was pretty typical of the subgenre.

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### **Mia says**

This is a review of an advanced copy which may differ from the final version of the book.

I give this book five stars for the extent I relate to it and how it personally affects me, four stars on a purely objective evaluation.

This is a prequel to Myke Cole's SHADOW OPS series. It takes place years before the events of the first book of the aforementioned series. This is a perfectly fine –perhaps even ideal-- introduction to Mr. Cole's works. The understanding and appreciation of this series is not dependent on having read the first series – SHADOW OPS. In some ways, beginning with this book may be a better progression. GEMINI CELL is a kind of origin story of the Supernatural Corps, the prominent group in Mr. Cole's SHADOW OPS series. This prequel details the beginnings of the United States' attempt to rein in and inject organization into the magical chaos that randomly manifested in society.

Jim Schweitzer was a Navy Seal, an elite among elites. He was skillful, competent, a leader. He is proud of and loves being part of military aristocracy, almost as much as his love of, and pride in, being a husband and father. While on a mission, he stumbles upon a well-guarded secret, becomes a target for elimination, and is

overpowered and defeated.

When he comes to, he does so in the tattered remnants of his physical body, sharing a consciousness with a foreign spirit, both of them plucked from oblivion and conjoined by a sorcerer. Amid all this confusion, Jim is once again called into service by his country as part of the ultra-secret Gemini Cell, an undead army of sorts. The resultant fused and resurrected being is fiercely powerful and Jim must relearn the capabilities and limits of his own body. He must further grapple with the other spirit inhabiting his corporeal being as well as with some problematic demands and orders of his new superiors.

It is difficult not to be intrigued by the magic surrounding the unusual triumvirate of sorcerer, spirit and soldier, an inherently problematic yet seemingly symbiotic relationship. A new world is emerging suffused with magic nobody yet understands much less control. Yet magic is power and power will always be sought after and fought for. It is certainly at the top of the wish list of the U.S. Government.

GEMINI CELL is unquestionably Myke Cole's most polished work to date, by a considerable margin. The characters are more diverse and complex-- alternately sympathetic, frustrating and deplorable, but all parts fascinating, not the least of which for their monumental miscalculations, erroneous judgment, and failures. It is worth noting that Jim Schweitzer is married to what is described as a singular, formidable woman. I must reserve judgment here, however, as for about three-quarters of the book, this was more of a tell rather than show introduction. I hope to be regaled by the specifics of Sarah's unique brand of tough in the next installments.

Cole shows no qualms placing any of the characters in jeopardy, often of the potentially fatal kind. It is a fearlessness echoed throughout the book. You cannot be other than dauntless when attempting to demystify the inner workings of the military. Myke Cole succeeds in a curious thing-- the humanization of a soldier. He does this by giving equal attention to all other things a soldier may be-- son, father, husband, friend, man. An ordinary person's perception of the military is largely informed by the media which portrays it as a juggernaut subsuming individuals into its overarching superstructure. Training is intended to render response rote and reflexive, hierarchy is primordial, and obedience to orders is non-negotiable. While service is the underlying consideration, the most immediate objective of a deployed soldier is to survive: "It was better to be judged by twelve than carried by eight." Or this more extensive explanation:

"xxx The scalpel isn't the hand that moves it. You can't be both the hand and the blade, Sarah. That's how you get juntas. I don't worry about the nature of evil. There are no good guys or bad guys. There's only alive or dead. Mission objectives accomplished or failed."

Yet the instinct for survival exists side by side with the desire to protect those one serves with and it is not uncommon for one's individual moral parameters to be at odds with operational directives he is given. Philosophy has the luxury of examining morality in a vacuum. Combat does not enjoy the same luxury. The portrait of the exigencies of war is almost totally awash in grey. Yet through it all, the individual strives to assert itself: "It is the very last inch of us, she said of integrity, but within that inch we are free."

Once again, Cole delves into the clash between individual rights and the governmental assertion of the common good. Analyzed in isolation, each side is rational and defensible; their interaction in the same space, however, will always be fraught with complications. There are definite instances when they are mutually exclusive and one or the other must prevail. What is admirable is the balance Cole achieves in presenting the different sides to this dilemma. There is no transparent agenda or endorsement of any particular point of view. In the examination of the fictional characters' differing positions, however, a reader is spurred to thought that may lead to the development of his or her own personal stance.

GEMINI CELL also deals with trauma from different sources-- loss, injury, violence. Symptoms, reactions, responses are varied and unpredictable, gripping fear the only constant. Trauma is singular and distinct, resisting comparison, and forever changes a person.

For the following lines alone, GEMINI CELL will always stand out for me:

“This was the thing about religious types she hated so much. They never missed a chance to proselytize. No tragedy was sacred, no setback off-limits. They would solemnly enter your private space, regal and pompous as crows, full of righteous self-importance. Then, when she was at her weakest, they would tell her why the unacceptable was acceptable, why it was okay that she'd lost the love of her life because an invisible man in the sky (and it was always a man, wasn't it?) had willed it.”

The above-cited lines are so insightful and fearless. It describes with a sharpshooter's accuracy the ultimate loneliness of grief and the almost wholesale ineffectiveness of attempts at comfort, particularly those consisting of religious platitudes. This is an amazingly insightful observation about the ritual of consolation-- how it often forgets that loss and grief ought to be about the griever not the consoler, how cliches and pro-forma condolences provide the very opposite of comfort, how it is perhaps better to remain silent than to say the absolute wrong thing.

I have not forgotten the action. In a way, I always assume that a Myke Cole book would have a considerable amount of action and GEMINI CELL is no exception. It bears noting, however, that this book more seamlessly integrates other sub-genres into Cole's trademark military fantasy-- science fiction, mystery, romance.

GEMINI CELL feels novel and fresh and trumpets the start of another must-read series by Myke Cole. To paraphrase a character in the book: this is something new. The fun--and the reward-- lies in discovering how. But don't tell Mr. Cole-- he abhors fun.

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