



Armored

John Joseph Adams (Editor) , David Barr Kirtley (Contributor) , David D. Levine (Contributor) , Michael A. Stackpole (Contributor) , Alastair Reynolds (Contributor) , David Sherman (Contributor) , Tanya Huff (Contributor) , Karin Lowachee (Contributor) , more... John Jackson Miller (Contributor) , Christie Yant (Contributor) , Ethan Skarstedt (Contributor) , Ian Douglas (Contributor) , Brandon Sanderson (Contributor) , Carrie Vaughn (Contributor) , Wendy N. Wagner (Contributor) , Jak Wagner (Contributor) , Lauren Beukes (Contributor) , Robert Buettner (Contributor) , Daniel H. Wilson (Contributor) , Sean Williams (Contributor) , Orson Scott Card (Foreward) , Jack Campbell (Contributor) , David Klecha (Contributor) , Tobias S. Buckell (Contributor) , Genevieve Valentine (Contributor) , Dan Abnett (Contributor) , Jack McDevitt (Contributor) , Simon R. Green (Contributor) ...less

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Armor up for a metal-pounding feast of action, adventure and amazing speculation by topnotch writers (including Nebula-award winner Jack McDevitt, Sean Williams, Dan Abnett, Simon Green, and Jack Campbell) on a future warrior that might very well be just around the corner. Science fiction readers and gamers have long been fascinated by the idea of going to battle in suits of powered combat armor or at the interior controls of giant mechs. First, when the armor starts to take over, even the generals may be at its mercy—and under its control. Then solve the problem of armored rescue when irradiated vacuum stands between the frail flesh of the living and safety. And what happens when the marriage of soldier and armor becomes a bit *too* intimate—and that marriage goes sour!

It's an armor-plated clip of hard-hitting tales featuring exoskeleton adventure with fascinating takes on possible future armors ranging from the style of personal power suits seen in *Starship Troopers* and *Halo* to the servo-controlled bipedal beast-mech style encountered in *Mechwarrior* and *Battletech*.

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From Reader Review Armored for online ebook

Ric says

(This review is based on an ARC.) How to rate an anthology has always been a struggle. Invariably, they end up in the 3-star "I don't know" category. Plus I seldom read all the stories. So for this exercise, I'll give ratings for each story that I actually try to read.

5-star

4-star

"Hell's Half-Acre" Jack Campbell

"Jungle Walkers" David Klecha & Tobias S. Buckell

3-star

"The Johnson Maneuver" Ian Douglas

"The Cat's Pajamas" Jack McDevitt

2-star

1-star

Mieczyslaw Kasprzyk says

It seems ages since I last read an anthology of short SF stories. It used to be ALL I ever used to read at times when I was a student in Leeds and it really broadened my experience of SF. This book is very much in the same vein; a series of short stories tied together by the theme of "powered/ sentient body armour". The range of stories is very good so no reader should find it disappointing - I can't think of any that I felt let down by but there were a number that I really did like.

"Hell's Half Acre" is a brilliant tale of how brutal war would get when your soldiers are turned into almost-supermen by their armour. There is a lovely twist in the tale as well! "Power Armour" is a love story that has, shall we say, "unusual" elements... we all wear "armour in our relationships... when do we let those barriers fall? "Don Quixote" reminds me very much of the good SF I used to read in the early 70s and "The Green" has that brutal realism found in some of the best modern stuff.

Sound stuff!

Cathy says

I only found this because I was doing a search on Lauren Beukes, I wasn't looking for a book about military sci-fi. But the editor is right, who doesn't love a story with some good powered armor? Starship Troopers was probably my first, the Iron Man movies probably the wittiest (and biggest budget), Mark L. Van Name's Jon & Lobo series uses it to good effect. So while I'm not the biggest fan of military sci-fi (I like it in general, I'm just not into detailed battles and strategies), I had to give the rest of the stories a try as well.

Early on in the book many of the stories felt very classic, almost old-fashioned. What is it about this idea that took so many people back to this so formal, classic, '40 style of writing? They were enjoyable, don't get me wrong. But for a while I was just a bit thrown that so many of the stories were in that vein, wondering if many of the writers had Starship Troopers flashbacks and felt sentimental or why so many of the stories had that tone. I was wondering why no one thought Iron Man or projected into the future and space and got modern or post-modern and witty with it. But we did finally get some more modern stories late on in the book. So I guess the editor was sort of going for an arc of older-fashioned to futuristic, grouping like to like to some degree. Now that I see the whole thing, it makes sense, but I was a bit frustrated during it. And it is interesting to see how many authors fell into very similar concepts with their stories. A large chunk of the book is traditional military sci-fi, a battle scene with a military man facing off against an enemy, and in this case using armor to help fight his battle. Three of the authors set their stories jungles, that was quite a coincidence. But mostly I was surprised at how few of the authors thought outside the military/battle box. Maybe it's because it's what some of them usually do and they wanted to show off their work. And they were all good at it, there wasn't one bad story here, and I'm picky. I'm not a short story fan in general and if I get bored I'll abandon a story in the middle, skim right through an anthology for the few stories I like. I read and enjoyed every story in this book. I just kept hoping for more variety, it was interesting to see how the theme seemed to limit the authors' thinking instead of inspiring them.

Nevertheless, it was a very good book. I spent many days reading every word of every story. I added a couple of authors to my to-read list (which really is the point of anthologies, isn't it?) and reminded myself about a few who've been lingering on my to-read list for much to long. And I added a couple of the editor's other anthologies to my to-read list as well. A successful effort all-around.

Douglas - Very good, classic sensibility, good use of Marine history.

Campbell - Also classic, felt very Heinlein.

Klecha & Buckell - Lots of good commentary in the form of story, what I love about great sci-fi, without being too heavy-handed about it. About Corporal Faisal Jabar: "Was it this hot where you grew up, Corporal?" Van Duine asked. Jabar glanced down, confused. "What? No, I grew up in Toledo." And the center of the bio-plastics industry that's convincing the drug lords that their crop is more profitable than cocoa: Monsanto. The politics and economics are all too believable in this one, scary. And it was a good twist to make them have to fight against the "enemy metal" while they weren't able to wear their armor. It ended up having a bit more detailed military maneuvering and battle action than I generally prefer, but most people will probably like that. It was quite a good story, substantial and very well done all around. I added Buckell's Crystal Rain to my to-read list.

Valentine - It was OK. I liked the concept, but I found it confusing to get into, and it wasn't really a complete short story, it ended like it was the first chapter of a novel. But at least it was a change of pace, it wasn't an old-fashioned Heinlein-esque story. (Not that that's a bad thing.)

Abnett - Another very old-fashioned story. I liked how short it was, it conveyed its character and his tale quickly but not without emotion. It had good style. A good, and ironic, example that longer isn't always better.

McDevitt - The cat was good, but it was a bit too technical to be compelling. -- As I read further in the book I appreciated it more because it wasn't about war. Few of the authors seemed to be able to imagine uses for armor beyond the typical battle armor, it was nice to see it being used routinely for travel and exploration, and in this particular case for rescue.

Green - Now that was a surprise, a modern and emotional story from the king of kitschy urban fantasy. Not that he doesn't write every genre, and I liked his Deathstalker books quite a bit too, as well as several of his stand alone novels. But lately he's been writing the generally quite uneven Nightside books (look at all of the bizarre ideas and creatures I can come up with, often at the expense of telling a story!) and Secret Histories (I'm a fan, but they're sometimes more of the same) and now there's the Ghost Finders series, which seems to be a weak attempt to expand on the theme). So this was a pleasant surprise. The dark concepts of how anyone gets put in the cans by the government, how Paul got into his accident, how the AIs get their voices, and the twist on Paul's AI, each hit solid punches, it was dark and twisted but felt very believable and very human. The end of the story was a bit of a letdown, but the middle made that not matter as much. It was just nice to see him do something very different for a change.

Kirtley - Too cheesy. Not awful, just eh. -- Again, upon reflection, I appreciate that it wasn't a war story, it was a more creative take on how to use the concept.

Levine - A very good story, great use of history, and somehow because it was historical it escaped feeling dated like some of the other stories that had old-fashioned tones and styles but were set in the future. It just felt fresher, although still appropriate to the time and setting, no anachronisms or anything. Just a nice little story with a solid beginning, middle and end, it felt complete.

Reynolds - Good enough but very much what I expected, just another war armor story. It told me that if I like good military sci-fi, I'll probably like his books.

Sherman - Another solid military sci-fi story, good advertising for what he does. I liked that the armor was just a natural part of the Marines doing their jobs and not the main focus of the story. Editorially it was a good place to slot this story, give readers a break from the stories with the heavy focus on tough armor. This armor is cool too, but it was integrated into their jobs, lives, and the story.

Huff - It was fine. At least it was sci-fi, had some aliens in it. Other than that it was pretty much the same as the rest of them.

Lowachee - Finally something different, forward thinking sci-fi with different dynamics, a very good story.

Jackson Miller - It seemed really cool, creative sci-fi with an interesting alien twist, but then he skipped the actual action pay-off and just described it after the fact. I know it's a short story, not much time to get into the details, but it was a real let-down.

Yant - A decent very short story.

Skarstedt & Sanderson - Very well developed characters and story. Very original world and situation as well. Looking forward to the novel they're collaborating on, hoping it relates to this because I want to know more about the enemy and how that works, as well as the good guys. It was so well done, even with my bad memory, I remember enough as I'm editing this review to be really intrigued by amount of detail they packed into this and want to know more. Even though military sci-fi isn't my thing normally, if it's like this it's sure to be a good story.

Vaughn - A bit idealistic. Once an idea is out there, it's hard to hold it back. If these two guys had it then they would have done it again, and other people would have too. But it was just a story.

Wagner & Wagner - Good story. Believable projection of the future dynamics between Earth and the

colonies. Strong heroine.

Beukes - Good story, haunting.

Buettner - Cute. History, fables?

Wilson - I liked the African setting and the boy. It certainly held my attention with the desperation and the dark tone, and I appreciated that the use of armor was different. The very end was a bit dramatic.

Williams - This was the story I'd been waiting for. It started off perfect, reminded me immediately how much I've been wanting to read his sci-fi. It was a great story, just the kind of thing I like. I had characters that you liked and wanted to figure out, a mystery that you wanted to figure out even more, and a really interesting setting with aliens and a whole diverse set of cultures and histories to discover. All in a tiny story. And not a war story! Nice way to end the book too as it was the story that appeared to be set the farthest in the future, or at least had the most futuristic feeling to it.

David Caldwell says

A collection of 23 short stories with the focus of powered battle armor. Most of the stories are set in the future, but a few explore power armor from a slightly altered past. While the armor always plays a significant role, it is the men and women inside, and why they wear armor. that provide the real story.

I have to admit something about this book. Like most collections, I flip to the table of contents to see if I recognize any of the authors. This time, I saw the dedication page and made my decision to buy it. The book is dedicated to Robert A. Heinlein and John Steakley. Robert A. Heinlein wrote Starship Troopers and John Steakley wrote Armor. Both feature powered armor, both are wonderful stories (for very different reasons) and are two of my favorite all-time reads. When I did get to the table of contents, I recognized several authors which was an even bigger bonus.

Truthfully, I expected most of the stories to be more military sci-fi than anything else. I was wrong in that respect. There is fighting but that isn't the main focus of most of the stories. It is about the people in the armor and why they chose to wear it.

Like most collections, I liked some stories better than others and even had one or two that I could have happily skipped. The ironic thing is that the story that impressed me the least was the most straightforward armor fighting story. (I kept expecting a twist because it was so straightforward but one never came.)

Would Heinlein and Steakley be proud that they helped to inspire these stories? For the most part, I would think so. Are they very similar to either Starship Troopers or Armor? Not really. But that just shows how much room there is for stories about people wearing suits of armor.

This one is definitely worth checking out.

Stefano G. says

My review is only related to "Heuristic Algorithm and Reasoning Response Engine" by Ethan Skarstedt and Brandon Sanderson, Brandon's short story is the reason I bought this anthology.

This is a sci-fi short story, in which Karith Marudi is a special agent dropping onto a planet in a huge fighting robot, I imagined something like the robots the humans in 'The Matrix - Movie' used... There's a bit of world-building with the local alien civilization that he should train, and an interesting relationship with the robots AI, which he calls Harry... I found this to be an ok read, but not overly gripping and even though I would say I like sci-fi, I didn't really like this that much... I only really got into the story a bit towards the end, in an action packed heroic last stand...

I don't recommend it to others, was not really worth it other than reading all Brandon's works...

Mitchel Seehafer says

Armored was quite the anthology to read, especially for it being my first. I thoroughly enjoyed how the authors explore many varies roles and uses of Power Armor and Mecha in very interesting settings. Even exploring the role of standard flesh and blood infantry versus their armored counterparts. I would have to recommend this anthology to anyone one how enjoys Military Science fiction, almost all of what is mentioned is incredibly believable as something you see in possibly our own future as the US Army continues its powered rig development.

Alex Ristea says

Seeing as how I haven't touched this book in over a year, and it's currently sitting in storage somewhere, I think it's safe to say that we'll be shelving this away until a later date.

Anthologies are always hit or miss, and this one unfortunately fell into the latter category.

Kelly says

Sadly, for those who write introductions and forewords for anthologies, I often only glance at them in passing, then move on to the good stuff – the stories. In this instance, the first sentence of the foreword by Orson Scott Card leapt out and grabbed me, just as the first line of a good story should. I read the entire thing and enjoyed it. Card had many thought-provoking things to say about why someone wears armour and who that person is, essentially, a theme explored by many of the stories in the anthology.

I went on to read the introduction by John Joseph Adams, the editor of the anthology and also enjoyed his thoughts on the subject matter. John Adams is an accomplished anthology editor and he has pulled together a compelling selection of stories in 'Armored'. Apparently, it's the first anthology of its type about mechs, power armour and bio-suits. My only question was, why did they wait so long?

As always, when you read an anthology, some names will stand out and others will be unfamiliar. As always, I leapt in without prejudice and read every single story. Based on the author list alone, I had an idea which

stories I would find entertaining. I did stumble across a few surprises, however, and I made a couple of new discoveries which means my pile of books to be read has grown by another approximate dozen.

The very first story, 'The Johnson Maneuver' by Ian Douglas, perfectly explores the idea laid out in the foreword, that regardless of how much power and how many gadgets we put inside mechanised armour, it still comes down to the man inside. From this story onward, the authors explore armour from the inside out. Some of the stories are written from the perspective of plausibly sentient AIs while others are set in a low tech settings, the armour itself little more than a collection of steam-powered joints and plates. Not all of the stories occur in a far flung future. 'The Last Days Of The Kelly Gang' by David Levine and 'Don Quixote' by Carrie Vaughn are the notable exceptions.

One of my favourite stories in the anthology was 'The Cat's Pajamas' by Jack McDevitt. I have been a fan of McDevitt for years and he is one of the few authors I run out and buy hardcovers from. They make a nice line on my bookshelves, the spines of the Alex Benedict novels, the Priscilla Hutchins novels and just about everything else in between. 'The Cat's Pajamas' features Priscilla Hutchins on an early mission that quickly becomes anything but routine. While it's always great to read another 'Hutch' story, the stars of this story are Jake and the cat they find aboard an abandoned research vessel. In a sideway step familiar to regular readers of Jack McDevitt, Jake proves that extraordinary men and women do not necessarily need to 'wear' their armour in order to do great things.

A story that will haunt me for some time and send me out in search of new novels was 'Hel's Half-Acre' by Jack Campbell. Author of 'Stark's War' and the 'Lost Fleet' novels, Jack Campbell has a deft touch with military Science Fiction. He does not baffle the reader with overly technical terms and remembers that the men and women behind the guns or, in this instance, in the mechanised armour, are very human.

Jack Campbell's combination of humour and horror caught me from the very first paragraph. The setting is an inhospitable planet and the war sounds like most wars, the rhyme and reason are lost beneath the relentless need to capture the next ridge or forward position. The soldiers are encased in armour that does everything except think for them, though it tries. After carrying out manoeuvres that strengthens their position, the unit is ordered to do something seemingly irrational. It is only afterwards that the reader finds out exactly what the mechanised armour is really capable of and it's just damned scary.

One of the stories that truly surprised me was 'Find Heaven And Hell In The Smallest Things' by Simon R. Green. I have tried to read Simon Green's fantasy and found it not to my taste. The tone of this story was bleak, however, which of course meant I liked it. The soldiers in this story are fighting plants, vicious and voracious vegetation intent on halting any attempt to colonise the planet. This theme, menacing plants, is explored just as effectively by another story in the anthology, 'The Green' by Lauren Beukes. In Simon Green's story, however, the men and women inside the suits are barely trained. In fact, they're barely there. Victims of accidents on Earth, their leftovers are piled into suits along with the voice of a loved one (as the AI) and dumped onto this new planet to pay for their medical costs. It's macabre and, as expected, they don't adjust well. A lot of them go missing.

Another haunting theme explored by Alistair Reynolds in 'Trauma Pod' and Tanya Huff in 'You Do What You Do', is pilots losing themselves in the machines they become integrated with. Both stories introduce the line between human and machine, then catapult the reader across it.

There are twenty-three stories in 'Armoured', spanning six hundred pages. I wish I could talk about them all! I cannot, but I will mention a few more.

‘Power Armor: A Love Story’ by David Barr Kirtley was a thoroughly entertaining tale about the man inside the armour. Anthony Blair vows never to leave the armour, believing himself safe. One woman is determined to see them man behind the mask however. ‘Nomad’ by Karin Lowachee is a love story of a different sort, one party being the armour itself. I found the tale and the emotion very touching. ‘Helmet’ by Daniel H. Wilson was an utterly chilling story about who exists inside the faceless armour. Hint: It’s not who you expect! At the opposite end of the spectrum, I giggled my way through ‘Sticks And Stones’ Robert Buettner.

Finally, the last story in the anthology, ‘The N-Body Solution’ by Sean Williams, read more like a novella. Tourists - not your ordinary sort, this is Science Fiction, after all – are stranded on their journey through ‘the loop’. Among them are a man and what might be a woman, her armour makes it hard to tell. The story investigates their pasts and presents, unravelling the mysteries in a very compelling way. The final reveals were unexpected, even after having read twenty-two other stories of a similar genre.

All in all, I thoroughly enjoyed this collection of stories. Any anthology can begin to feel repetitive after a while, but the variety of authors and their exploration of a simple theme – armour, powered or otherwise – kept me entertained from the first page to the last.

Written for and originally published by SFCrowsnest.com

Matt Reno says

As with any anthology, some of the stories are really well written and some are just filler

Trike says

My ultimate take-away from this collection of stories is that there's nothing new to say about power armor. All you can hope for is really good writing of tales we've seen before. If you've never read stories about this sort of thing, this might be a decent introduction, but this is well-trod ground for long-time readers of SF.

Of course, the problem is that I'm measuring these stories against the best the field has come up with. Haldeman's *The Forever War*, Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* and especially Gordon R. Dickson's novella "In the Bone", which deconstructs the powered armor story figuratively and, within the tale itself, literally.

That said, let's parse this sucker.

Foreword by Orson Scott Card. He says a bunch of obvious stuff, to the point where I thought, "Oh shut up, you idiot."

The Johnson Maneuver by Ian Douglas. This is a by-the-numbers Military SF story with an interesting alien culture sweetening the pot of the typical "competent Marine versus incompetent paper-pusher". Well-written and a decent way to ease into the collection.

Hel's Half-Acre by Jack Campbell. Another by-the-book armor story by another veteran MilSF writer, this is predictable but well-written.

Jungle Walkers by David Klecha & Tobias S. Buckell. A near-future story that is informed by the realities of what actual conflicts are about. This is one of the better stories in this collection. The good news is that you can read it for free here at io9.

The Last Run of the *Coppelia* by Genevieve Valentine. This story is different from most in that the powered armor is semi-sentient pseudo-biological suits designed for aquatic work. It's hampered by some unclear action scenes, but the characters are nicely done.

Death Reported of Last Surviving Veteran of the Great War by Dan Abnett. This was just a lazy pseudo-obituary and should have been rejected.

The Cat's Pajamas by Jack McDevitt. One of my favorite stories of the bunch, this one feels like a classic Larry Niven story where the characters are presented with a problem that requires some out-of-the-box creative thinking. The power armor in this case isn't for military use but rather to protect against the beyond-extreme environment near a pulsar. Cats are cliche in sci-fi, but this one I really liked.

Find Heaven and Hell in the Smallest Things by Simon R. Green. A character study more than anything else that offends my sense of justice. It feels very much in the vein of 60s New Wave stuff, but the unfair denouement aggravates me.

Power Armor: A Love Story by David Barr Kirtley. Despite the terrible title, this is actually a pretty decent character sketch about opening yourself up to love. The metaphor is a bit obvious in that the main character has sealed himself into his power armor because he is justifiably frightened of assassination and only true love can get him to "open up"... his armor. But the writing is good and dialogue is nice.

The Last Days of the Kelly Gang by David D. Levine. A true rarity: a science fictional steampunk story. This is one of two of these here and this is the good one, with excellent writing and terrific characters. It didn't hurt that I read this the week after returning from Australia, so the setting was fresh in my mind, but this could be set in the American West, too.

Field Test by Michael Stackpole. I'm not sure if this qualifies as Alternate History or Secret History, but the story takes place during the recent uprising in Libya, with a soldier using an experimental battlesuit to wreak havoc during Ghaddafi's fall from power. Great action scenes, fun characters, superb dialogue. This should be used to teach SF writers how to do infodumps that aren't annoying. You get everything you need to know about the situation while also learning about the characters and it flows together seamlessly.

Trauma Pod by Alastair Reynolds. A decent story that we've seen before (and will again in this collection) but the pieces fall into place readily enough. (view spoiler)

Contained Vacuum by David Sherman. This was a boring action bit that felt like a level in a mediocre space combat video game. It was probably inspired by Dead Space or something similar and it feels like it.

You Do What You Do by Tanya Huff. This is similar to Trauma Pod in that it explores what happens to people who interface too closely and too intensely with machines. Unlike trauma Pod, it is unambiguous about what happens, but is ambiguous about whether it's a good thing or not.

Nomad by Karin Lowachee. This is a cracking-good story about betrayal and death and moving on from losing the one great love of your life, using a post-apocalyptic powered armor gang warfare story as the framing device. This is the kind of story that would look good as a movie but wouldn't translate well.

Human Error by John Jackson Miller. Like *The Cat's Pajamas* this is a Nivenesque tale of being forced to find solutions to apparently insurmountable problems. In this case problems caused by a shipping error, where someone sent human soldiers power armor meant for starfish-like aliens... and it just so happens that they are facing a mindless glob of goo that eats everything in its wake, including entire planets. It's the good ol' "adapt, improvise, overcome" story that's so much fun in sci-fi.

Transfer of Ownership by Christie Yant. This story was particularly satisfying for me because it combines the outside-the-box thinking I like in stories as well as the sentient power armor tale with a genuinely satisfying ending that wasn't a "happy ending" but appealed to my sense of justice. It's almost as if Yant has perfectly (and intentionally) synthesized a number of the other stories in this collection.

Heuristic Algorithmic and Reasoning Response Engine by Ethan Skarstedt & Brandon Sanderson. I don't have anything good to say about this story. The aliens are uninteresting, the action is tedious, the dialogue some of the worst I've ever seen and it just stops. There's no ending. It's as if they got to the number of words they contracted to write and quit. This is an example of how not to write a story.

Don Quixote by Carrie Vaughn. This is the opposite of *The Last Days of the Kelly gang*. Really lifeless steampunk that just didn't work on any level.

The Poacher by Wendy Wagner & Jack Wagner. After two really terrible stories in a row, this one bounced back with a well-told story of a park ranger on a future Earth that's protected as a heritage site. The recent story of poachers poisoning over 300 elephants as well as other animals like lions in Zimbabwe with the aid of government officials really underscores how important this sort of thing is, and I'm all about rangers trying to protect fragile ecosystems from greedy little bastards.

The Green by Lauren Beukes. This is a horror story, plain and simple. It's depressing and sad, but also terrifically written. The ending is horrific but feels inevitable. Sadly, despite its removal from anything familiar by placing it far in the future on a distant planet, it speaks directly to the actions of so many heartless corporations today, which is what the best science fiction does.

Sticks and Stones by Robert Buettner. This story has a lighter tone than the one surrounding it which makes it feel almost like a comedy, but it, too, is a really well-done throwback to stories from the golden age of sci-fi. A little push-pull of Imperialism as well as Star Trek's Prime Directive is always good for a tidy little story. Again, it suits my sense of justice to give the good guys a fighting chance.

Helmet by Daniel H. Wilson. This is powerful stuff, of heroism and horror, human decency struggling to survive amongst brutal inhumanity. It works on both levels as science fiction and as commentary on current events in war-torn Anywhere. This story surprised me the most, because I totally hated Wilson's novel *Robopocalypse*, which I felt was a lazy version of *World War Z*.

The N-Body Solution by Sean Williams. This story was good in that it gives us a glimpse of how alien things can be, but the underlying "twist" is one that's been done before. (view spoiler) It's a decent enough tale, but the familiarity of the pieces works against it, and the power armor aspect of it is rather incidental.

Ron says

“An awful lot of people go crazy, when you take the humanity away, and lock them inside a box.”

Better-than-average anthology. While some stories are SF combat, some aren't. The common thread is that all involve a future version of whole-body armor. Explores many interpersonal and philosophic issues. My favorites were: Field Test, Don Quixote, and N-body Solution.

“It was never about armor ... it was about the man inside.”

Jon says

Listened to "Don Quixote" by Carrie Vaughn (4 stars) via StarShipSofa podcast (Episode 401)

Jon says

Awesome. Why? Because it's mechanized armor, that's why. Who doesn't love armored suits?? NO ONE.

Chris "Gunner" McGrath says

In the interest of owning every Brandon Sanderson story, I decided to pick this book up. Imagine my delight when I found a brand new, autographed copy on Amazon for under \$2 (\$6 shipped)!

Despite the relatively high ratio of very good stories to bad ones in this anthology, I find my overall impression of the collection to be mediocre. Many of these stories feel like their only purpose was to be included in this book, though I'm sure that's probably not the case, and plenty others were very original. Maybe it's just that as a theme, power armor is not really interesting enough to justify reading so many stories about it all in a row.

Simon R. Green provides the only "must-read" story here, though I did enjoy those by Jack Campbell, David Barr Kirtley, David D. Levine, Christie Yant, Wendy & Jack Wagner, Lauren Beukes, Robert Buettner, and Sean Williams a lot, with a number of others turning in decent if forgettable works. I am disappointed in the one co-written by Brandon Sanderson, and his name is the reason I read this book at all, so that's unfortunate.

So I leave the book with a 4 star rating but a less-than-glowing review. I guess that means it's worth picking up, but maybe not for reading all at once.

Samuel Rooke says

Short, and somewhat sweet. Unlike its unwieldy title, this short story is a lean, competently-written little science-fiction adventure.

There's no great ambition here (unusual for a story co-written by Sanderson!), but there's no great failings either. Some decent worldbuilding concepts, but no memorable story to wrap around them.

Worth the read if one is a big fan of mecha-type stories, but I'd say only for die-hard Sanderson fans that must read everything he's had a hand in (like me, hence me reading this!) otherwise.

I give it two mechasuits, and an annoying A.I.
