



The Mammoth Book of SF Wars

Ian Watson (Editor) , Ian Whates (Editor) , Catherine Asaro , Neal Asher , David Drake , Elizabeth Moon , David Weber

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Over the past 100 years the technology of war has advanced enormously in destructive power. So what will future wars be like? And what will cause them: religion, politics, resources, refugees, or advanced weaponry itself? Watson and Whates present a collection of gripping SF stories which explores a daunting gamut of possible future conflicts: nuclear tactics and enhanced soldiery, terrorism and cyberware, intelligent robotic machines and even war with aliens.

The Mammoth Book of SF Wars Details

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From Reader Review The Mammoth Book of SF Wars for online ebook

Tarl says

This is the second time I have picked this anthology up to read. The first time, I couldn't get past Ian Watson's introduction and the massive ego he displays in it in regards to his Warhammer 40k fiction. Of course Black Library won't allow you to reprint Warhammer 40k stories outside of their publications, they have their own publishing company for a reason. (and isn't this anthology about military science fiction, NOT Warhammer 40k fiction?) Much to be said, this time I managed to get onto the stories themselves. (I will note here that I respect Watson's skill as a writer. I do not feel the introduction to an anthology is the proper place to talk about one's own popularity or to put down another publication simply because they wouldn't let you print material copyrighted by them)

This collection of stories is all in all a real grab bag of various takes on what military science fiction is/can be. We see all sorts of stories here that run the gambit from military photographer to steampunk pilot to reporter to the expected pov of those fighting the wars themselves. It creates a nice flow of stories and prevents the entire anthology from becoming stagnant while you are reading it. The various povs also help to provide various contexts when it comes to battles in the future and how it may affect those who experience or witness them.

As with any anthology, there are certain stories that seem to fall short, and those that are above and beyond what one would expect. One of the surprises for me was *Storming Hell* by Josh Lambshead, the before mentioned steampunk story. Out of all the things I expected in this anthology, a steampunk story was not one of them, even if it does deal with interstellar travel. Lambshead has crafted a very interesting story here, and his writing was enjoyable, but when compared to the other stories in this collection, it felt out of place. Now, steampunk is a subgenre of science fiction, I recognize that. But it is the odd child out in this collection, and that fact felt very apparent to me while I was reading. Perhaps it would have fit better in The Mammoth Book of Steampunk.

In the end, this anthology collects together a number of experienced authors and presents some wonderful stories dealing with war in the future. If you are interested in how you can approach science fiction and either war or the military, this anthology is a good choice to pick up. If you are simply looking for a science fiction anthology to read, you may want to think heavily on the fact that this one is centered on war, as that theme comes across extremely clear throughout all the stories contained within. Personally, there weren't enough stories that stood out enough to get more than a three star rating, but I still enjoyed it overall.

John Loyd says

The Mammoth book of SF Wars (2012) 497 pages, edited by Ian Watson and Ian Whates.

I got this book because I new there was a Skolian (by Asaro) in it. I was disappointed in the first few stories I read, but either I saved the best for last or I got used to the theme of the book.

1 • Peacekeeper • (2012) 19 pages by Mike Resnick, Brad R. Torgerson

Good/VG. Earth sends soldiers to a distant planet in exchange for technology from the Conglomerate.

20 • From Out of the Sun, Endlessly Singing • (2012) 12 pages by Simon R. Green

OK. A sort of folk tale of how humanity used three individuals to beat an overwhelming foe.

32 • All For Love • (1962) 20 pages by Algis Budrys

OK/Good. A single enormous alien spaceship has landed in the middle of America. Malachi Runner is going on a mission which involves sneaking up to the ship.

52 • The War Artist • (2011) 13 pages by Tony Ballantyne

Very good/good. An artist accompanies a troop of soldiers into a country thrown into chaos after hackers crashed their computer infrastructure disintegrated. He keeps getting asked, "What are you going to paint?"

65 • The War Memorial • (1995) 6 pages by Allen Steele

OK/good. During a battle on the moon, the armored spacesuit of one of the soldiers fails.

71 • Politics • (1990) 27 pages by Elizabeth N. Moon

Poor but probably good. I read Tinker Vargas as being whiny. Saying how the marines did the tough part and were mocked behind their backs by the navy. Complaining how the higher ups were putting them in this unwinnable situation. It made the whole story tedious. Turn around that perception and the complexion of the story would change.

98 • Arena • (1944) 27 pages by Fredric Brown

Good/vg. Humans were in a battle with the Outsiders. Two great armadas facing off against one another when Bob Carson finds himself on some hot planet with blue sand when a voice tells him that he and one Outsider have been chosen to face one another in single combat to determine the winner of the war.

125 • Peacekeeping Mission • (2008) 11 pages by Laura Resnick

Fair. A satire where the US and Canada are at war.

136 • The Peacemaker • (1964) 9 pages by Fred Saberhagen

Very good/good. A berserker has come close to a far flung colony. Carson takes a unarmed scout ship out to try to negotiate with it.

145 • Junked • (2009) 20 pages by Andy Remic

Fair/good. Quad-Gal Military has sent three combat-K soldiers to assassinate General Zenab who is masterminding the Junks.

165 • The Liberation of Earth • (1953) 20 pages by William Tenn

Good. Earth becomes a battleground between two sets of aliens.

185 • A Clean Escape • (1985) 15 pages by John Kessel

Very Good. Havelmann comes to see Dr. Evans every day always thinking that it's the spring of 1984 and this is the first time he has met her.

200 • Storming Hell • (2009) 8 pages by John Lamshead

Excellent. This universe has aethershops, that have jump pilots and sail at closer range. I liked the style. Sarah is a great main character. Good action and some humor thrown in.

238 • Solidarity • (2005) 58 pages by Walter Jon Williams

VG/Excellent. Lady Sula is trying to recruit the crime lords into joining the rebellion against the Naxid. She starts by meeting with Casimir with a pretext of offering to sell him real IDs with false identities.

296 • The Price • (2010) 26 pages by Michael Z. Williamson

Very Good. Soldiers on a recon ship get sent a missions to take out as many of several enemy targets as they can. None of the targets gives them a realistic chance of coming back alive. We follow as they attempt to take out three targets.

322 • The Horars of War • (1970) 19 pages by Gene Wolfe

Good. A journalist goes undercover as a HORARS, Homolog ORganisms (Army Replacement Simulations), writing pieces that humanize these soldiers.

341 • The Traitor • (1997) 24 pages by David Weber

Good/OK. A bolo, sentient tank, has gone rogue. Left its post and ran, instead of staying and fighting. Another bolo is sent to investigate.

365 • The Game of Rat and Dragon • (1955) 17 pages by Cordwainer Smith

Good/vg. Interstellar travel was very risky because of the dragons that lived in the darkness. A burst of light will kill them. That creates a pinlightning job for telepaths. Which brought the risk down only slightly until they started using partners.

382 • Caught In the Crossfire • (1978) 15 pages by David Drake

Very Good. A troop of soldiers takes control of a small villiage in order to ambush an enemy convoy. The problem is the locals are going to die in the crossfire.

397 • The Rhine's World Incident • (2008) 15 pages by Neal Asher

Good. A small group of separatists are engaged in an action. After the mission is complete they try to make their getaway. Very good action, but no real explanation of why.

412 • Winning Peace • (2007) 27 pages by Paul J. McAuley

Excellent/vg. The ware between the Alliance and the Confederation is over. Former POW, , rather than being returned was sent to indentured bondage. Mr. Kanta bought 's contract and is going to use ___ in a scheme to get his salvage company out of debt.

439 • Time Piece • (1970) 10 pages by Joe W. Haldeman

Good. Francisco's third mission, a team of him and two other soldiers go on a scouting mission. This is a universe bound by relativistic laws. Although he is physically 30, he is 458 years old and most of his friends are dead.

449 • The Wake • (2011) 14 pages by Dan Abnett

Good/vg. Mendoza was killed during the last skirmish with the scaries. The platoon is starting a new tradition by having a wake for him.

463 • The Pyre of New Day • (2012) 35 pages by Catherine Asaro

Excellent. The planet New Day is a terraformed colony gone wrong. Soz is part of a recovery team to help the colonists.

Christina Hannan says

This anthology had a wide variety of stories which kept it interesting and made me want to know what happened next. Some of the stories were faced paced and action packed whereas others had a more delicate hand due to it being undercover. If you're new to sci-fi and want to have a broad view of what you'll be getting into in terms of space opera, this is a wonderful book to start with.

Earl Biringer says

Individual stories rated as follows:

5* - A classic.

4* - A really good story, recommended reading.

3* - A decent story

2* - Not a good story, something seriously inhibited any enjoyment

1* - Unreadable and/or a complete waste of time

Resnick, Mike and Torgersen, Brad R.: Peacekeeper ***

Green, Simon R.: From Out Of The Sun, Endlessly Singing ***

Budrys, Algis: All For Love ***

Ballantyne, Tony: The War Artist ***

Steele, Allen: The War Memorial ***** (The shortest story in the collection - a lot of other writers should learn something from Steele: poignancy requires brevity!)

Moon, Elizabeth: Politics ***

Brown, Fredric: Arena *** (NOTE: This story was 68 years old at the time of publication. If it had been more recent, it would have only gotten 2 stars - or maybe even just one. The theme is a complete cliché today, but it may very well have been new in 1944.)

Resnick, Laura: Peacekeeping Mission *** (I love a good satire and this one almost got four stars, but it really was just too obvious.)

Saberhagen, Fred: The Peacemaker ***** (A classic story from a classic author.)

Remic, Andy: Junked * (Should have been called "Junk." Reads like it was written by a third grader: preposterously clichéd dialog, wooden characters, inane plot.)

Tenn, William: The Liberation Of Earth ***** (Another satire, a classic one this time, and it delivers the goods.)

Kessel, John: A Clean Escape ***

Lampshead, John: Storming Hell ***** (Not really a fan of steampunk, but this one worked, despite its smarmy ending.)

Williams, Walter John: Solidarity ***

Williamson, Michael Z.: The Price * (possibly worse than the Remic story above, with basically the same problems.)

Wolfe, Gene: The Horars Of War ***** (Another classic story, rather different from the extended fantasy novels Wolfe would go on to become famous for.)

Weber, David: The Traitor ***** (Not much to say about it except it definitely left an impression on me!)

Smith, Cordwainer: The Game Of Rat And Dragon ***** (Another one that probably would have been docked a star had it been more recent due to some now-clichéd plot elements. Smith's prose would keep this no lower than a three-star level even if it were his grocery list.)

Drake, David: Caught In The Crossfire ***

Asher, Neal: The Rhine's World Incident ***

McAuley, Paul: Winning Peace ***

Haldeman, Joe: Time Piece ***** (Taken in and of itself, it probably only deserves three stars. But this is the root of his classic novel, "The Forever War", so it gets an extra star for that.)

Abnett, Dave: The Wake ***

Asaro, Catherine: The Pyre Of New Day ***

Jaq says

Some exceptional tales interspersed with the more ordinary. Loved the inclusion of Simon Greens short story, that one never gets old, and still haunts me.

Florin Pitea says

A very good anthology focused on future wars. Some of the stories within are classic ("Arena" by Frederic Brown or "The Game of Rat and Dragon" by Cordwainer Smith), others are more recent. I particularly liked "Storming Hell" by John Lampshead (steampunk space opera, no less) and "From Out of the Sun, Endlessly Singing" by Simon R. Green, an excellent homage to Cordwainer Smith. For an extended review, please visit my blog here: <http://tesatorul.blogspot.ro/2013/07/...>

Milo? Dumbraci says

I had high expectations, since I love military scifi, but was pretty disappointed.

First, I expected military like in "combat", but almost all of the stories happen after wars, before wars, collateral to wars or from the POV of non-combatants.

Second, I liked about a quarter of the stories, but the rest felt ok at best (some, quite numerous, I really disliked). The main problem was that I found many to be over-precious, over-worded and lame, the kind of stories meant not to entertain or enthrall, but to show off how amazing the author is. They weren't.

The average would be 3/5, but the anthology as a whole felt less, the reason being the same: I disliked the kind of scifi Watson&Whates chose, for being "too much for too little", and in the future I'll avoid their anthologies (like Datlow's or JJ Adam's; from Whates this is my second try, both disliked). The kind I love is that chosen in anthologies by Greenberg, Mike Ashley, Sterling, Stephen Jones, Dozois - in that order.

The 6/24 stories I liked here were:

Peacekeeper • (2012) 19 pages by Mike Resnick, Brad R. Torgerson

- Storming Hell • (2009) 8 pages by John Lambshead

- The Horars of War • (1970) 19 pages by Gene Wolfe

- The Game of Rat and Dragon • (1955) 17 pages by Cordwainer Smith

- Winning Peace • (2007) 27 pages by Paul J. McAuley

- The Wake • (2011) 14 pages by Dan Abnett

About 3-4 others from 24 were ok.

14-15/24 were lame at best...

Mike says

A very good anthology of sci-fi war stories, with all the stories being either pretty good to excellent. It doesn't take just recent stories either, but ranges across the 20th and 21st century. There is a proto-version of Joe Haldeman's "Forever War" in the form of "Time Piece", a fascinating story told from the perspective of two sentient war machines (The Traitor), and a interstellar conflict told as a legend in "From out of the Sun, Endlessly Singing" to name a few. I would highly recommend this anthology to anyone who enjoys military sci-fi. The stories I thought were particularly good (for those who prefer to skim anthologies):

- From Out of the Sun, Endlessly Singing

- The Peacekeeping Mission (nice satire here)

- Storming Hell (a dash of steam punk in this one)

- Solitary

- The Traitor

- Time Piece

But the rest of the stories are certainly worth the time invested to read them

Bart Vervaeet says

all in all I liked it. There were some stories that were quite lame, but overall most of them felt okay.

The title of the book is a bit misleading though. All of the stories play against the background of some

intergalactic war or other, several of them don't even have a combat scene in them, and usually I ended up liking these the most.

As this book also contains stories written more than 50 years ago as well as new work, it gives a nice overview of SF writing as it evolved through time.

If you like short stories, I would recommend you give this one a try

Jon says

Like most of the "Mammoth Book of X" this was overall excellent. I'd read some of the stories before, but most were new to me, and a few were specifically written for this book. They ranged in overall plot, but all had something to do with SF and war. If you like military SF, you'll probably like this. Even if you _don't_ like it, as a rule, there's probably a story or two in here that will resonate with you. It's not all "OORAH MILITARY LIFE IS AWESOME".

Kerry says

I totally admit, right up front, that I'm only reading this for Catherine Asaro's new Soz story. SF Wars aren't really my thing and normally I wouldn't pick up a book with a title like this.

But I'm a big fan of Catherine's and also of Soz's, so I'm looking forward to see this piece of her backstory filled.

And a nice little story it was too. That's all. Just a little story. I know I always want more when I finish a Skolian story, but I really do this time, because this is just a little teaser. I want to know what happens next. I want to see some of Soz and Hypron's time together (even though I know it ends because I've read books set later). I want to see him coping with the world she'll bring him into. With getting the biomech so he can walk again. I want to see her being happy with him. (For all that she was happy with Jato at the end of Aurora in Four Voices, I also know that didn't end so well in the end.) Sad though it would be, I'd also like to see her losing him. I want it all. Greedy, aren't I? And all from a little short story.

Susan says

Peacekeeper • shortstory by Brad R. Torgersen and Mike Resnick
From Out of the Sun, Endlessly Singing • shortstory by Simon R. Green
All for Love • (1962) • shortstory by Algis Budrys
Junked: A Combat K Adventure by Andy Remic
The War Artist • (2011) • shortstory by Tony Ballantyne
The War Memorial • [Near Space] • (1995) • shortstory by Allen Steele
Politics • (1990) • novelette by Elizabeth Moon
Arena • (1944) • novelette by Fredric Brown
Peacekeeping Mission • (2008) • shortstory by Laura Resnick
The Peacemaker • [Berserker] • (1964) • shortstory by Fred Saberhagen (variant of The Life Hater)

The Liberation of Earth • (1953) • shortstory by William Tenn
A Clean Escape • (1985) • shortstory by John Kessel
Storming Hell • (2009) • novelette by John Lamshead
Solidarity • (2005) • novella by Walter Jon Williams
The Price • (2010) • novelette by Michael Z. Williamson
The Horars of War • (1970) • shortstory by Gene Wolfe (variant of The HORARS of War)
The Traitor • [Bolo] • (1997) • novelette by David Weber
The Game of Rat and Dragon • [The Instrumentality of Mankind] • (1955) • shortstory by Cordwainer Smith
Caught in the Crossfire • [Hammer's Slammers] • (1978) • shortstory by David Drake
The Rhine's World Incident • [Polity Universe] • (2008) • shortstory by Neal Asher
Winning Peace • [Jackaroo] • (2007) • novelette by Paul J. McAuley [as by Paul McAuley]
Time Piece • (1970) • shortstory by Joe Haldeman
The Wake • (2011) • shortstory by Dan Abnett
♦ "The Pyre of New Day"by Cathering Asaro read 4/10/2014

Laura says

I'm not the target audience for this book, so giving it a star rating doesn't seem quite fair. I bought this book strictly for the new Skolia Universe story by Catherine Asaro and ended up reading the whole thing because it was the book on my phone. The Asaro story centers around Sozdeny Valdoria, one of the best heroines in all of SF given her mix of strength, integrity and femininity. It is always welcome to see another bit of Soz's"story, and this glimpse did not dissappoint. This story alone was worth the price of the e-book.

However, just as for me the Asaro story was the high point and "War Memorial" was the low point, I imagine there was another reader out there who thought the touch of romance was a distraction from a war story and actually enjoyed reading nothing but the excruciating details of how a battle on a moon plays out with very little context for who the characters are outside their battle suits. While there were other gems in this book (I would love to read the rest of the story of the steampunk heroine in "Storming Hell", and I loved the telepathic cats in another story), painful stories of soldiers in unremittingly grim situations, suffering tortured deaths, with no larger story of hope or redemption is just not my thing. Most of this book I wouldn't have made it through if it weren't for it being less boring to read it than to stand in various lines in the various places one stands in lines not reading it.

Angie Boyter says

Wonderful selection of authors!

As several readers have commented, there is a new Soz story by Catherine Asaro. There are 2 other original stories and a good selection of classic and newer SF authors.

It was interesting to me, though, that perhaps because of the editors' choices or perhaps because of my interpretations of the stories, these were not gungho military pieces for the most part but showed the tragedy of war as much as the bravery and triumph.

Yanik Franken says

What a wonderfully diverse collection! Barring a few out of place and/or simply badly written stories this has been a lovely ride with introductions to quite a few new authors for me.

Peacekeeper starts the collection of nicely. Not too otherworldly in narrative or location, but the concept of interplanetary corvéé-military that is used by bigger galactic players for unknown purposes is a solid one. Good prose and tempo with some vivid descriptions during the fighting and in the prison compound.

From out of the Sun Endlessly Singing is short and sweet. Lovely characters which don't need many words to paint interesting images and a darkly humorous plot.

All for Love was okay. A bit overdramatic on the heroics and most of the time stark in its descriptions. The plot is interesting enough but has little movement going for it; which makes the actions and thoughts of the protagonist its main vehicle. Which aren't that great. I liked the misshaped fanatic bad guy but could care very little for 'Runner'.

The War Artist was very well done. A decent short arc with some sharp characters and action pieces. The whole thing was quite layered in representations and perspectives. A case in point for the assignment of the protagonist.

The War Memorial was pretty cool. A lovely perspective with some gritty narrations of the horrors of a doomed assault.

Moon's Politics was the first real hit in here. First-person narrative of a desperate situation that unfolds and thickens. Some lovely detail in protocols and experience that make this fragment of a situation that much more of an actual snippet of a timeline. Short-storytelling done right.

Arena is a very interesting piece. Not so much about warfare as about preventing it in a very sci-fi way. Brown does a good job in making you care for the situation; our race is at stake and we have no clue of what's going on. Guessing along and cheering for the poor human sod was nice.

The Piece keeping Mission is quite darkly hilarious. The details of this backwards world; highlighting hypocrisies and ridiculing geopolitics and war as a whole is lovely rest stop in-between somewhat more tense stories.

The Peacemaker is another nice one on the nature of paranoid warmongering and whether humans can even live without it. Strong ending.

Junked was bad. The first few pages were straightforward character expositions and a plot that promised to go nowhere at top speed. Could not and would not go past those opening pages.

The Liberation of Earth is pretty neat and quite funny. Earth as a playground for an interstellar war with humanity doggedly clamping to its new overlords. While the story is wonderful, it sometimes fails to stay in its character of being an oral myth that, generations down, the nomadic stone-age storytellers should have no way of having this kind of technical knowledge of some of the happenings.

The Clean Escape was excellent and well worth the praise. Chilling, vicious and dark all confined in a small

room.

Storming Hell is brilliant. Powerful storytelling with some sharp characters embedded in a spacefaring Victorian society. The first of the cadre of great female protagonists in the collection. The transdimensional scenes are gripping and vivid; very reminiscent of Vance's bizar descriptions of parallel worlds. Loved it!

Followed up by my favorite in this volume, Solidarity. It's a bit longer than most, but worth it all the way. Gredel/Sula is a wonderful, lively, badass character thrusting through a gripping story. Again some lovely Vance-esque scenes with lavish parties combined with intrigue. Would love to read more of Jon Williams.

While a bit stark, The Price was quite gripping, making a good point of the inability for soldiers to see large strategic movements. Some badass actions.

The Horrors of War was great overall, though Wolfe's narrative sometimes dances the line of eloquent prose and obfuscating wordheaps. A fine display of the conflicting nature of humanity driving onwards with AI and genetically modified beings as a spearhead for its dirty jobs.

The Traitor has an interesting concept with sentient, humongous, melodramatic tanks. But that's about it. The switching between (quite bad) narrative and (overly poetic) tank logbooks is a nice touch but both fail in enticing me to read on. Dragging on way too long, didn't finish it. Meh.

Game of Cat and Dragon was lovely in both its storytelling and its ideas. Its concepts were quite fantastic but well worked out. The action scenes and cats' characteristics especially well done.

Caught in the crossfire was nasty, bleak, not very sci-fi. Perhaps it was leaning too much on the shock value of the deaths and the ones committing them. It drives its points home harshly, semi-effectively.

The Rhine's World incident was quite nasty, I liked the style. It's the only one in the volume that employs 'aliens in the vent system' action but pulls it off well.

Winning Peace was pretty cool; lovely to see a conflict through the eyes of a non-combatant in. McAuley has created a nicely thick world that reminded me of the contrasting Mass Effect universe; scientific yet vibrant with backwater cesspools away from civilized high-tech space.

Time Piece was nicely grizzly, okay storewise, but strongly narrated. The concept of time dilution through hyperspace travel on interplanetary mercenaries was pretty neatly implemented.

The Wake was awesome with some real Dead Space moments. I am a huge fan of Abnett's Darkblade series and wanted to read more of his for a while. No disappointment here. Dark atmosphere, gory situations black humor. Lovely

The Pyre of New Day had a lot to live up to with all the buzz in these reviews. Coming in as a close second favorite after Solidarity, it did deliver. Asaro is indeed incredible and will definitely read more of her! A good pace, great use of typology awesome action combined with the actual horror of combat situations and the act of killing set on a dying world as richly described as its atmospheric thickness.
