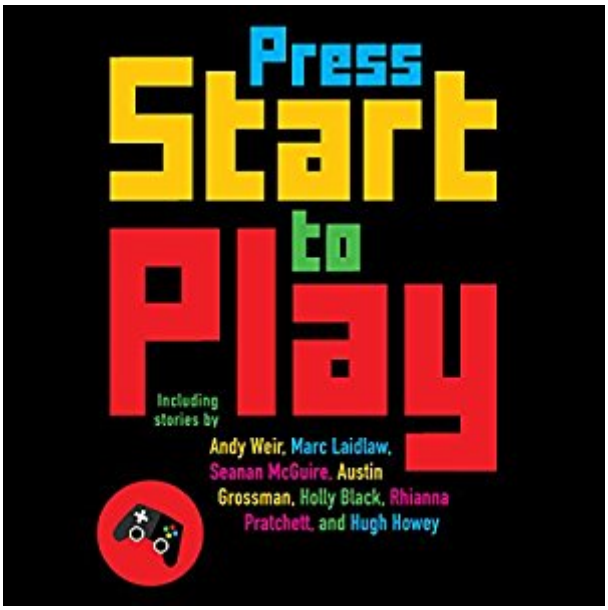
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Synopsis

It’s dangerous to go alone! Take this. You are standing in a room filled with books, faced with a difficult decision. Suddenly, one with a distinctive cover catches your eye. It is a groundbreaking anthology of short stories from award-winning writers and game-industry titans who have embarked on a quest to explore what happens when video games and science fiction collide. From text-based adventures to first-person shooters, dungeon crawlers to horror games, these 26 stories play with our notion of what video games can be - and what they can become - in smart and singular ways. With a foreword from Ernest Cline, best-selling author of Ready Player One, Press Start to Play includes work from: Daniel H. Wilson, Charles Yu, Hiroshi Sakurazaka, S. R. Mastrantone, Charlie Jane Anders, Holly Black, Seanan McGuire, Django Wexler, Nicole Feldringer, Chris Avellone, David Barr Kirtley, T. C. Boyle, Marc Laidlaw, Robin Wasserman, Micky Neilson, Cory Doctorow, Jessica Barber, Chris Kluwe, Marguerite K. Bennett, Rhianna Pratchett, Austin Grossman, Yoon Ha Lee, Ken Liu, Catherynne M. Valente, Andy Weir, and Hugh Howey. Your inventory includes keys, a cell phone, and a wallet. What would you like to do?

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Customer Reviews

An excellent short story collection from some of the industry’s masters. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

This was a great compilation of short stories with the focus on gaming. There were a lot of different perspectives, all very engaging and entertaining. I am not a hard core gamer, but have grown up

with arcades in the malls, and the old school Atari systems as well as the more current gaming systems. They have always created a fun diversion for me, and I have many fond memories spending my quarters in the arcade with my friends. This book brought those fun times back. I would recommend this book to anyone who wants an imaginative break from reality with a side of nostalgia and a healthy dose of sci-fi.

Nice stories from people in genre and nerd culture.

Quite nice to read give it a go!

As with most collections I have read, there are some very good, some not so good, and some I chose to not finish. Was happy to see Hugh Howey, as well as the author of The Martian. I am not a gamer, which no doubt colors my opinion.

Originally published at HubCityReview.comÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s dangerous to go alone! Take this.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•The words jumped out at me as I meandered through the bookstore. It is a phrase every self-respecting gamer who had grown up with the video games medium from its nascent Golden Age on through the present day knows by heart. It is arguably among the most famous lines in the last thirty years of gaming, right up there with ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The cake is a lieÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• and ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Your princess is in another castleÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (story of my life).Now those same iconic words were boldly adorning the back cover of a prominently displayed paperback, flanked by stylishly-rendered 8-bit flames. Like Luke upon hearing the equally famous ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Help me Obi Wan Kenobi,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• I had to know the rest of the message. I read on.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“You are standing in a room filled with books, facing a difficult decision. A distinctive cover catches your eye. It is a groundbreaking anthology of short stories from award winning writers and game-industry titans who have embarked on a quest to explore what happens when video games and science fiction collideÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| Your inventory includes keys, a cell phone, and a wallet. What would you like to do?ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•>_I am of course well aware of the phrase ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Never judge a book by its cover,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• but this one had already proved creative and compelling, and what I read next even more so. Ernest Cline (author of Ready Player One, one of my favorite novels in recent years). Andy Weir (author of The Martian, the adaptation of which proved among the best films of the year). Catherynne M. Valente (whose prose style surpasses that of any living author, the

best since George MacDonald himself). With that I was sold.>_Over the past several years, the short story has overtaken the novel as my personal preference in consuming fictive literature. Experience has taught me that the number of worthwhile pieces in any anthology will always be outnumbered by the worthless ones, or if not worthless than at least not worth my time. In the best anthologies the ratio of these two categories approaches 50%. This is not among the best anthologies.There are a few true gems, to be sure. Save Me Plz, despite the worst title of the collection, is easily the best of the bunch, with regards to having both the most engaging narrative and the most relevant musings on the nature of games. A particularly poignant excerpt reads:ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“WhatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s real is just an accident. No one designed reality to be compellingÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦ But aworld is so designedÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦ ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s the world as it should be, full of wonder and adventure. To privilege reality simply because it is reality just represents a mental parochialism.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•The Clockwork Soldier and The Fresh Prince of Gamma World similarly combine sharp prose with a clear love of the games medium and genuine respect for the players who engage in it. All three are exactly what this anthology promise: classic science fiction aimed at video game enthusiasts.Such is not the case for many others in the collection. Far from the exploration of humanity and its future through the speculative lens of fringe science and emerging technologies, as per Asimov and Dick and Stapleton and Wells and many others more, much of modern science fiction is merely the appropriation of its tropes and trappings in service of climate, gender, and racial politics. This is not to discount the importance our societyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s ongoing conversations about such topics, nor to deny fictionÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s preeminent power to slip ideas ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“past watchful dragons.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• The problem is two-fold: 1) stories centered on post-colonialist racial politics and feminist gender politics have become so ubiquitous in modern science fiction as to drown everything else out, and 2) their presence in this particular collection reduces video games to a mere pretext, a trojan horse instead of a central theme. Of particular guilt in this regard are Outliers, All the People in Your Party Have Died, AndaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Game, and Stats.On the spectrum between the extreme ends of outstanding to awful outlined above falls the rest of the collection, ranging from genuinely good stories which merely fall short of the authorsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ proven potentials (Killswitch and Twarrior) to others which would barely merit a passing grade in an entry level Creative Writing class in undergrad (Respawn, Survival Horror, , and Coma Kings).Below is a short summery of each story, sans spoilers.God Mode by Daniel H. WilsonA love story set against a strange apocalypse in which most of the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“assetsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• to the supposed reality a being deleted one by one,

beginning with the stars overhead.NPC by Charles YuThe first of several second person point of view stories in this collection, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• are a generic non-player character who gains volition and begins to live the glamorous life of a player character.Respawn by Hiroshi SakurazakaUpon being murdered a Japanese man learns that his memories and consciousness transfer to the first person to come across his dead body.Desert Walk by S. R. MastrantoneAn atmospheric horror story with clear inspirations from ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The RingÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• that slowly pulls back the mystery on a seemingly innocuous retro game.Rat CatcherÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Yellow by Charlie Jane AndersTaking its title from a fictive degenerative disease reminiscent in some ways of autistic savants, the atypical neurology unique to those whoÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve contracted it leads to novel engagement with the ludic systems of a particular game, proving to have huge potential benefits for society.1UP by Holly BlackWhile attending the funeral of an online friend a group of mourners discover a text-based game on the deceased teenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s computer, the completion of which promises answers to his mysterious passing.Survival Horror by Seanan McGuireAn awkward admixture of pop-culture callouts and supernatural elements, a succubus and his cousin get trapped inside a cursed video game.Real by Django WexlerA reclusive former developer and current drunk is tracked down and divulges the the horrific secrets behind a series of deaths related to his popular alternate reality game.Outliers by Nicole FeldringerA self-righteous heiress-turned-bohemian further estranges herself from her family as she rises through the leaderboards of a gamified crowd-sourced analysis of climate models till she begins to take issue with the underlying algorithms. by Chris AvelloneA horror story inspired by classic text-adventure games.Save Me Plz by David Barr KirtleyA perfect blend of real world touchstones, familiar game tropes, and philosophical explorations of real scientific concepts, all of which cohesively feed into one another. These perfect opening lines set the tone for a story you need to read for yourself: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Meg hadnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t heard from Devon in four months, and realized that she missed him. So on a whim she tossed her sword and scabbard into the backseat of her car and drove to campus to see him.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•The Relive Box by T. C. BoyleA widower spends an increasing amount of time in his life living in the past after purchasing a console-like device that allows one to re-experience old memories with perfect recall.Roguelike by Marc LaidlawAnother second person story, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• are multiple characters throughout, all short-lived and experiencing a deadly gauntlet reminiscent of Roguelike games.All the People in Your Party Have Died by Robin WassermanA closeted lesbian during her first years teaching elementary school in the mid-ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœ80s begins an affair with the computer lab instructor who introduces the

former to an Oregon Trail analog.Recoil! By Micky NeilsonA would be game designer alpha testing a friendÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s new shooter is forced to pick up an actual gun when the plot of Die Hard begins to play out at the game developersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ offices.AndaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Game by Cory DoctorowEnderÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Game, albeit instead of precocious children fighting bugs from space, in this story a clan of powderpuffs engaging in the slaughter of gold farming child slaves from third world sweatshops, bringing awareness to a real world problem through poor prose and unlikable characters.Coma Kings by Jessica BarberThe top-player of a game called Coma seeks reconciliation with her vegetative sister after the latter hardwired herself into the game.Stats by Marguerite K. BennetA ham-fisted story about empathy sees the stereotypically evil, privileged white man experience the everyday hardships of various minorities as his body undergoes drastic changes.Please Continue by Chris KluweAn autobiographical account by a former NFL player using terminology reminiscent of esports.Creation Screen by Rhianna PratchettThe soliloquy of an avatar in a massive multiplayer game to the player, beginning with character creation and eventually exhorting the player/reader to quest in his real world.The Fresh Prince of Gamma World by Austin GrossmanA fascinating exploration of the experience open world games offer players to seemingly live in two worlds simultaneously, this wonderfully written work is especially timely as the titular Gamma World draws obvious inspirations from the imminent Fallout 4, being the irradiated remains of an alternate history Boston.GamerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s End by Yoon Ha LeeOf the numerous stories in this collection in which the seemingly real stakes a revealed to be a simulation, this is the least accessible as it takes place in a dense science-fiction universe fleshed out in the authorÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s other writings.The Clockwork Soldier by Ken LiuTwo stories, one of an intergalactic bounty hunter and her princely captive, the other of a fairly-tale princess and her clockwork companion, beautifully parallel each other in a fascinating meditation on sentience, free will, and artificial intelligence.Killswitch by Catherynne M. ValenteThe brief history of a game with true perma-death, which deletes itself after a single failed attempt, and has gone decades without ever being beaten.Twarrior by Andy WeirA former hacker gets a mysterious message from a strange benefactor with ties to his college days.Select Character by Hugh HoweyA husband is delighted to learn that his wife has taken up his favorite shooter during maternity leave, watching from the couch as she plays the game in an unintuitive manner.> Recommend book?>_

Most of the stories, while generally written well, we’re pretty depressing. I find this weird since all of the authors claim to be video game fans. I play video games to relax and generally have a good time. Yes, horror video games can get pretty dark but still, as the hero/protagonist you generally

triumph/win at the end. Otherwise, why play it? In my opinion. And out of these 26 stories, most had a pretty depressing and/or WTF sort of ending. Not all, but a lot. Leaving me with an overall opinion that the book was okay but not great. No re-read value, sadly.

Hit and miss collection of stories. A few were outstanding, most were average...some not even that. Uneven read at best.

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