



Armor

John Steakley

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The military sci-fi classic in a striking new package

Felix is an Earth soldier, encased in special body armor designed to withstand Earth's most implacable enemy-a bioengineered, insectoid alien horde. But Felix is also equipped with internal mechanisms that enable him, and his fellow soldiers, to survive battle situations that would destroy a man's mind.

This is a remarkable novel of the horror, the courage, and the aftermath of combat--and how the strength of the human spirit can be the greatest armor of all.

Armor Details

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Author : John Steakley

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From Reader Review Armor for online ebook

Josh says

Armor consists of two storylines. One follows Felix, a soldier fighting against alien creatures known as "ants" on a planet known as Banshee, and the other storyline -- which begins abruptly about a quarter of the way through and continues until the final quarter -- follows a criminal named Jack Crow.

Felix's storyline is intense and powerful. Despite Steakley's lack of skill as a writer, he managed to create a character who was interesting, terrifying, and likable. In Felix, we have a genuine sci-fi superhero, and we share with him some of his worst and darkest moments. Yet Felix's story is crippled by Steakley's loss for words. For example, early into the story, a battle scene is described as "Terrible, terrible, awful, awful." How did this get past his editor? Poor descriptions such as this are peppered throughout the novel. I often found myself backtracking, sorting through ambiguous narrative trying to construct a scene.

The second storyline is truly terrible, terrible, awful, awful. Rather than third-person with Felix, we are stuck in first-person with Jack Crow, a sociopath whose first act is to kill an innocent man. We follow this loon around, reading page after page of his babbling internal dialogue. Nothing important happens here until much later. Feel free to skim. Only in the last few chapters do the storylines merge and then we learn that Crow is nothing more than an observer. He plays no significant role in the plot at all. The author included him just so we have a pair of eyes through which we can look at Felix. Ugh.

Aside from the bad writing, the confusing scene changes, and annoying characters, I do not understand why Fleet could not bombard Banshee from space. Why send soldiers? There seemed nothing to gain from ground-based warfare. Why was there never any support from the air? Why no armored vehicles? And how could these dumb ants possibly create starships? There was much that did not add up.

If only Steakley had stuck with Felix's story, I might have considered *Armor* a good novel. With proper editing, the ending could even have remained the same without forcing hours of pointless rambling on the reader. Felix was *more than enough* to pull the story along, but the author's obsession with Jack Crow and his hypersexual exploits all but ruined it for me.

Kat Hooper says

4.5 stars, audio version

ORIGINALLY POSTED AT Fantasy Literature.

"...everything you were hiding from was in there with you. That's the trouble with armor. It won't protect you from what you are."

Felix is a loner, a broken man with a mysterious past. When he's dropped with thousands of fellow soldiers on a toxic planet nicknamed "Banshee," he's the only survivor of the battle with the 8-foot tall "Ants" that live there. That's partly because of the special armor he wears -- his black nuclear-powered scout suit -- and partly because of the emotional armor he wears -- what he calls "The Engine" -- his lack of fear and compassion in dangerous situations. Because he doesn't really care if he dies, he is able to make quick detached decisions, and it's this armor, ironically, that keeps him alive.

After the battle, the computer assumes Felix is dead, and this glitch means that he's never assigned to R&R. Instead, he keeps getting dropped into the hordes of Ants on Banshee, and he continues to survive while everyone else dies. Prone to be solitary anyway, the fact that nobody around him lasts long means that Felix becomes more experienced than his leaders (though few people realize this), that he doesn't form any human bonds, and that his situation progressively gets more lonely, desperate, and tragic.

Felix is so emotionless and inaccessible, his environment is so bleak, and his situation is so grim, that I nearly quit reading *Armor*. It was just painful and hopeless. Then suddenly we leave Felix, jump several years into the future, and join up with Jack Crow, a notorious criminal who has escaped from prison and partnered with a space pirate. The two of them plan to infiltrate a research lab on a frontier planet. Jack is fascinated by a black scout suit he finds and he carries it to the research lab as a gift to Hollis, the scientist who runs the lab. Also intrigued, Hollis manages to hook into it so that they can relive Felix's experiences in the Antwar.

And they are horrified -- devastated by Felix's physical pain and mental suffering. But most of all, they're awed at his strength and his ability to go on in the face of such complete devastation and hopelessness, especially when they find out how Felix got his "armor" -- how he became this emotionless killing machine. Felix refuses to die and it affects them profoundly.

It affected me profoundly, too. After nearly quitting *Armor* because of its lack of emotion, I was surprised to eventually find myself stressed out and sobbing. You won't believe it at the beginning, but *Armor* becomes intensely emotional, especially for what's considered a "military SF" novel. This is not merely "military SF" -- it's a novel about suffering, compassion, love, and the human survival instinct. It just takes a while to get there, which makes it even more gratifying when it finally shows itself.

I listened to Blackstone Audio's version of *Armor*, narrated by Tom Weiner. His deep voice was perfect for a story with a bunch of rough men in it, but he did a great job with the female characters, too. I unhesitatingly recommend the audio version.

Armor isn't the perfect novel -- it's hard to believe in the Antwar because we never understand why humans want to be on this toxic planet, it's hard to believe in a computer glitch that can't be fixed, and there's some psychobabble that doesn't hold up to 21st century psychology (*Armor* was published in 1984), yet this is a powerful, character-focused, deeply emotional novel about human suffering and the will to survive.

The ending of *Armor* is both devastatingly glorious and agonizingly inconclusive. John Steakley was writing a sequel when he died in November 2010. An excerpt of the sequel, which I believe was not finished, can be found at this fan website. But I don't need a sequel -- I like the way *Armor* ended.

"Are you there Felix? Are you there?"

Jokoloyo says

I don't remember how long GR had been recommended this book to me based on my reading list. And some of my friends gave solid 5 star for this book. How can I not try to read this book?

It is a very good novel with great start and the last quarter of the novel. There are many psychological aspects in the story to make it not just a dumb action story. But I won't discuss the psy factor much, that's one

of main reading pleasure for this book.

The character of main protagonist is pretty deep, and without too much spoiler, I can imagine the character development of this main character until the end. And the battle scenes are great for raising my heart rate.

I found there are loose parts of the story. Unsolved plots, to say it mildly. The loose parts are around 20%-75% of the book. Some readers should be patient on 55% of the book. Then I read Dirk's review on the second last paragraph, regarding the unfinished sequel/series. Maybe that's the reason for the unfinished plots and the lack of some background stories.

I could say to bear with the slow pace on 55%. The first 20% is good military SF, and the last 75%-100% is the good payment for reader's effort reading this book.

Jason Fischer says

I've gotta say, I came into this book with high expectations. It started off brilliantly, with a great Starship Troopers feel....and then not only did the wheels fall off, the whole plot caught on fire and crashed into a kitten orphanage. No-one survived.

The Jack Crow plot-arc was AWFUL, waffling, pointless. GET ON WITH IT. There were points where the editing was abysmal, and I'm not just talking about the occasional typo. I'm talking about bits where paragraphs collided and partially repeated themselves, and I'm mystified as to how this sort of thing got by an editor. At one point, a doctor checks on a person who fainted, and their diagnosis? "this person is emotionally and intellectually exhausted." HOW DO YOU MEASURE THAT? There are points where the Jack Crow arc is logjammed with pointless cipher characters and about halfway through I had to lob this book into the rarest of categories....DID NOT FINISH.

How is this book considered awesome and canonical? HOW?

Simeon says

As I finished *Armor* by John Steakley this morning, I laughed a laughter from the depths of me.

Part 1

The story's divided into pieces and begins with Felix.

He's on a military starship orbiting a hostile planet called Banshee and about to be dropped into combat along with 10,000 fellow warriors. The invasion is similar to Normandy on D-Day, and we get our first glimpse of Felix in the mess hall the morning of the drop. He's a little like this:

A woman vomits at the breakfast-line right in front of Felix, whose attitude's one of and-no-fucks-were-given-that-day.

He climbs into his armor. And it begins.

The next 80 pages are fast. “Mazes,” “bunkers,” and “beacons” are about the most complex scenery beyond the scorching sand dunes. Bleak imagery and nightmare mark the killing ground of massive, ugly bugs that outnumber the warriors a thousand to one, and nearly everyone dies.

By the end of the book, the symbolic hostility of the planet Banshee weaves a recurring theme.

“Remember where you are,” Felix will say. “This is Banshee.”

He is the sole survivor, and you get more insight into his character, as it’s slowly revealed that far from a one-dimensional badass, Felix is a broken soul, his desire to die barely matched by his stubborn, masochistic refusal to do so.

More on this later.

Part 2 begins the parallel story of Jack Crow, right in the midst of a messy prison escape. The shift is abrupt, and perspective changes to first-person.

Jack Crow is a Galaxy-famous pirate and anti-hero,

equal parts

and

A self-centered asshole with the morals of a cockroach, Crow mistakenly believes he’s the toughest man alive. And, being in a lot of trouble, he strikes a deal with a ruthless Captain mutineer (the main antagonist besides Banshee itself) to charmingly infiltrate and subvert a research colony in exchange for a ship and lots and lots of money.

It’s an ugly deal for the colony, and Crow begins to have second thoughts.

Suffice it to say that before the finale, Jack Crow becomes:

Part 3, melding of the stories.

Against all odds, Felix has survived 20 drops.

Banshee wants him dead, the gigantic aliens they fight begin to recognize him, and he is forced to watch as those around him are destroyed one by one.

And yet, like some grotesque cosmic joke, Felix lives... for a while.

That's all I can say, except that I love Felix. They don't make heroes like that anymore. He is indestructible but frail. Maybe I like him because he's what every hero should be: you, but better, and with thousands of dead aliens at his feet.

ENDING

Holy shit the ending.

I will say nothing about it.

Final Thoughts

Pros:

- 1) Short
- 2) Surreal action
- 3) Ample badassery
- 4) Somewhat heartrending

Cons:

- 1) Short
- 2) Too short
- 3) Steakley could have written a sequel.
- 4) Why was there no sequel?
- 5) Fuck.

John Steakley died last year. So it goes. Rest in peace. I'm sorry you never got to finish the second book.
(Short excerpt of what he was working on.)

Characters similar to Felix from different genres:

The Witcher from The Last Wish
Arlen from The Warded Man
Takeshi Kovacs from Altered Carbon

PS

As a whole, *The Vorkosigan Saga* is still my favorite sci-fi series, followed closely by The Hitchhiker's Guide. (How not?)

PPS

That more sci-fi isn't like Armor shows a colossal failing in literature.

César Bustíos says

What a ride! It's truly a military science fiction jewel. If you liked Starship Troopers you're gonna love this one, Steakley was obviously inspired by Heinlein's work (ugly giant insect-like enemies, battle armors).

Somehow, I think this book hasn't had the attention it deserves. Can we please make a movie out of it? Or, better yet, a TV series? Please listen to me, Netflix!

It is now one of my all-time favorites. Highly recommended.

Concept art by Adam Lucas

According to Wikipedia, a sequel was in the works at the time of Steakley's death:

<https://web.archive.org/web/200612210...>

Tom says

Armor is a science fiction book from my "top ten list" of favorite Sci-Fi books, maybe in my top ten in any category.

This is probably my third or fourth re-read of this great book.

It's the story of Felix, a foot soldier in a war against an alien ant-like race. It's got your standard hard-core sci-fi plot elements: aliens who are seemingly unstoppable, a hero who might be more than he seems, a crusty space pirate who might really have a heart of gold, beautiful women, space ships, interstellar travel, etc., etc. But there's a lot more going on here too.

There is insight into the psychology of soldiers, the pessimism that comes out of being thrown into "the shit," day after day, deployment after deployment, for no discernible reason. And how that pessimism might actually be what holds them together and enables them to fight. It's also a commentary on the idiocy of war, how there's no such thing as "glory" and maybe how bravery isn't really bravery at all... but rather just what you're forced to do when you've run out of all other options.

That all sounds high-minded for what could be a screen play for a really bad B-movie, but nevertheless it delivers.

Terence says

If *Armor* comprised pages 7-89 and 261-374 (in my edition, i.e., Felix's story), John Steakley would have had the "gripping, forceful and compelling...tour de force" the cover blurb promises. Something that really could compare to *Starships Troopers* or *The Forever War*. Instead he had to go and break the narrative with Jack Crow's story. It's a WTF moment as you're roughly torn from the claustrophobic, terrifying, soul-crushing milieu of Banshee to...the cafeteria of an alien prison. And Steakley never recovers the narrative momentum. It's a colossal error in story-telling judgment.

As in *Vampires*, Steakley can write effective scenes of psychological torture that puts you there, even if you don't want to be. But he's not that compelling or original elsewhere. He still can't write a believable female character – Lya is another impossibly good Madonna, and Karen is the damaged whore. In a different novel and a better writer's hands, Jack and Karen's relationship *might* have been interesting but here it's trite and melodramatic. (Though I did like Steakley's coda: (view spoiler)

And the surprise ending was anything but. I could see it from several kilometers away. It's been done before. (view spoiler)

Recommendation:

Read the "Felix" sections because they really are quite good and skip the rest.

Dirk Grobbelaar says

This is a fascinating novel. It is, for the most part, a military science fiction story. Then again, it's something else entirely. Steakley actually juggles two stories here, both of which read like a novel in their own right. However, it soon becomes apparent that there *is* only one tale here, even if it takes two to get it told.

The novel opens like a fairly standard MilSF novel, reminiscent of *Starship Troopers* or *The Forever War*. This first sequence introduces us to **Felix**. There is a *lot* of momentum generated in these first chapters of the book. This is important, because this momentum carries the novel even when the pace slows down. Then we get to the **Jack Crow** sequence, which starts off fast and frenetic, but evolves and becomes, well, the *something else entirely* referred to earlier. The narrative of the novel alternates between Felix and Jack Crow. Of the two, the Jack Crow bits are often unevenly paced, varying between surprisingly violent scenes and slow, dream-like scenes of introspection. Yet this didn't seem to bother me. The Felix bits, mostly visceral combat scenes, barely ever let up in intensity, and will likely appeal to testosterone junkies. Like I mentioned, these two tales appear to be unrelated, but there is one thing that connects them: the *Armor* of the

title. The *how* and *why* of this is serious spoiler territory so I won't go there.

Honestly though, it's a really interesting story. It's also an interesting way of telling a story. Perhaps because the story was written in the early 80s there is a bit of residual seventies weirdness apparent. At times the characters appear positively stoned and act in inexplicable ways. You'll find yourself asking "why?" on more than one occasion, when Jack Crow does something totally out of character. On the other hand, we could argue that it signifies character development. But it's all good really. No really. In fact, it's *really* good.

According to sources on the net Steakley was working on a sequel when he passed away. It's a **real** shame. I would have loved to see where the story could go from here. There are some really cool revelations about the mystery that is Felix, and much of it is left unexplained. For example: what is The Engine that allows him to function under such extreme duress? And all that stuff about the Archon Guardian and the Masao? ...and who was Angel?

I hope I've piqued your interest. This novel comes recommended, because it's good, but also for its novelty value.

Nagrom says

Many have compared this book, often unfavorably, to Starship Troopers. Some going as far as to call it a rip off of Starship Troopers. I take a different perspective...

In an interview Steakley has actually said that he was inspired by Starship Troopers when he wrote Armor, and took many ideas for his book from Heinlein's. Not in an effort to steal, but as a compliment - Borrowing a scenario he loved and using it to explore a different idea.

Starship Troopers is an exploration of citizenship, duty, and patriotism in human terms.

Armor is an exploration of war and will - The human drive, and the resiliency of the human animal under the most extreme of circumstances. This exploration is primarily through the experiences of Felix, and the reactions of his observers, Jack Crow and company.

Felix is a soldier. A very good soldier. Too good. He cannot, will not, be defeated. Every battle, every fight, every amount of seemingly insurmountable difficulty he encounters, he champions. Suffering, being injured, but never being destroyed, and continually throwing himself and being thrown back into the fray. Against an endless, unstoppable, enemy, a race of giant sentient ants, who never stops coming. For all his victories, Felix' reality remains the same: The Antwar. A conflict, unexplained even to its fighters, on a desolate hellhole world: The planet Banshee, a barren desert, with subzero temperatures and screaming winds.

Felix' experience is shown through the recording devices inside his powered combat armor, which has come to be in the possession of a group of scientists, and Armor's secondary protagonist Jack Crow. As Crow and others become more and more sucked into Felix' world of despair and terror, made only more terrifying by his unstoppable will to never quit, their own problems only grow. Their own quiet place in space is becoming unstable, local forces and an enemy of Jack Crow's past coming together for a final conflict that forces them out of Felix' memories, and into a war of their own.

This book succeeds not for the writing - Which is either brilliant literary eccentricity, or just not that well crafted depending on your perspective - or even for the plot. It succeeds as a story of the human will. The machine, the monster, that lies within every man, and how he can choose to champion it, or let it destroy him. And of what a man of character and will is capable of doing with that monster - That "Engine".

This is one of the few books I visit over and over again. I have favorite parts and passages, which provide comfort, strength and reinforcement in times of need.

I also cannot keep a copy of this book on my shelves, as I am constantly giving them to people who need to read it.

Scott says

From an author named 'Steakley' you'd expect a two fisted, macho-sized t-bone of a story, and that is exactly what *Armor* delivers.

This is a story of one man's desperate attempts to survive as he is dropped on a strange alien world over and over again to fight endless waves of huge ant-like aliens intent on tearing him to pieces.

Like all good stories of this nature, however, there is more to *Armor* than marines frying 'bugs', yelling 'HOO-rah!' and engaging in homoerotic bonding rituals.

Armor is an engaging, If at times gruelling, story of what war can do to a soldier, of how to survive a person can be forced to strip away almost everything that makes them a person as we know them, instead becoming a creature of war- a relentless, unthinking killing machine comprised purely of instinct and quick reactions.

You've no doubt read novels built on similar concepts before, but *Armor* takes a different tack from many military SF stories.

This is *Starship Troopers*, stripped of hope, stripped of its political angle, stripped of everything except the desperate drive to survive constant brutal and bloody war. This is *Old Man's War* with no old men (they're all KIA) and extra emphasis on the war. This is *The Forever War*, with that book's decades of battles condensed into one year.

Felix is a recruit, assigned to the frontlines in a battle against an insectoid foe on their home world. The survival rate for the standard, heavily-armored troops on their first drop is low. For the army's scouts, equipped with a faster but less protective battle suit the percentage is under 10%. Felix is allocated a scout's armor, and so his long, lonely nightmare begins.

Everyone he serves with falls. Every friend, every leader. But not Felix. Felix survives, over and over again in drop after drop, finding himself the last man standing more times than he can count.

Through this constant trauma he endures only by tapping into his primal survival instinct- something he calls 'the engine', a drive for survival that makes him a relentless killing machine. The Engine makes Felix a one-man hurricane, but it changes him, stripping away who he was and making it harder and harder for him to do anything but fight.

While this Sisyphean struggle is going on, a second narrative runs throughout the book. On a distant world named Sanction a rogue name Jack Crow infiltrates a fleet facility to get an ally of his access to the base's powercore. While there he brings the facility director an old suit of battle armor that belonged to a scout, and is convinced to participate in the retrieval of memories from the suit's datacore.

We soon learn that the suit was Felix's and through it's datacore we learn more of the horror Felix endured,

and begin to understand what his eventual fate was. This secondary narrative isn't as compelling as the rest of the novel, and I found myself hanging out for the segments that revealed more of Felix's story.

It is in Felix's narrative of war and endurance that this novel really shines. *Armor* is a case study in desperation, fear and survival, and it stands tall among its Heinlein and Scalzi peers. It isn't perfect, but it's an interesting look at what war can do to a person and the ways in which trauma can reshape a mind and tear raw chunks off a person's humanity. Felix's sad and lonely journey through giant-bug infested hell makes for an engaging and visceral read.

Jim says

April 2018: This was one of the books I added to my shelves when I first joined GR back in 2007. I'm not sure when I last read it, but probably a few years before that. It finally won a group read in the Sci-fi and Heroic Fantasy group, so...

Wow! The book is written in parts. The first part is about Felix, an armored soldier who is dumped into a battle & blows all his fear breakers, so The Engine takes over. It's beautiful the way Steakley wrote this. I wonder if he did time in Vietnam. He's about the right age & only someone who has been in a really dangerous situation for some time could understand this disconnect. It happens in flashes when the adrenaline kicks in during a scary moment, but this one goes on after that's gone. Fear, sheer terror, is so overwhelming that a survival machine takes over, but the emotions lurk there ready to pounce if the guard is let down. The Engine has no emotions & Felix lives this way unable to break out because it's Banshee & it's full of bugs & the high command doesn't know anything & his is but to do or die, but they'll have to kill him & he keeps fighting. Pure battle horror full of needless death, noble sacrifice, & terrible choices. Everyone dies but Felix & the idiotic Brass that keeps sending him back in. Why? How? Who is he?

The second part is about Jack Crowe, the legend, who is a really likable guy with the morals of... actually, nothing. He has none, but he's still an affable guy. The Johnny Depp character in "Pirates of the Caribbean" seems to have been lifted from this novel. This section gets a bit old because I REALLY wanted to read about Felix & answer the questions, but read it closely. It's important & Felix does show up again.

I think there are 7 sections in all & the others are shorter than the first 2. There's another section like the first, but it's even more powerful & then there's the end. Wow! If you've been paying attention, you'll suspect what's coming, but that only makes it more powerful when it does happen.

Throughout, Steakley's characters burned into me. I liked-hated-loved-despised-pitied them in turns. Some got all of those & more. My emotions changed so often that by the end, I could feel their exhaustion. Judgement became simple again. I had no right to judge & there were bigger issues that had to be dealt with.

Finally finding out Felix's story is fantastic. Yes, it happens, but wait for it. Do NOT skip ahead even though you know you really want to. The journey is worth it. Everything was masterfully done & it made the book practically impossible to put down. I just glared over the book at any interruption.

I highly recommend reading this after *Starship Troopers* & *The Forever War*, but before *Old Man's War*. All of these feature men in armor doing battle in the future. This book most easily contrasts with *Starship Troopers* since they're both battling bugs, but this book goes outside the military & into a messy reality.

I can't recommend it highly enough.

Steakley died before finishing Armor II. Supposedly he dabbled with it for years & there is an excerpt floating around on the Internet. I have my doubts that it was written by him, though. I think it's fanfic. It's fairly short, adds nothing whatsoever to Armor & I suggest skipping it. If you just have to, I found it here as an .rtf. If the link goes bad, google "Armor 2 Steakley" & it will pop up.

Pre 2007: If you liked Heinlein's Starship Troopers & Haldeman's "The Forever War" here is a third to read. On the surface, the similarities are obvious - a future war in space with a young male soldier in powered armor. The similarities stop there, though. Where Heinlein is very pro military & Haldeman just the opposite (understandable considering their ages & military experiences) this book shows a better balanced view of war & its effects - more mature, IMO. The POV changes, unlike the other two & I think that heightens the point that Steakley was trying to make. It also makes the story a bit more complex than the other two & better written.

Starship Troopers is perfect reading for a teenager, The Forever War pretty much summed up how I felt about the military after doing my time. Reading "Armor" 15 or 20 years later was great timing for me. I've been lucky to read all 3 at the perfect times in my life when they would have the most impact. I've read all of them multiple times & enjoyed each immensely, even though my opinions of their themes have varied as I've aged.

Johnny Atomic says

Love. Hate.

Some people love this book more than Halloween, kittens and Disney World combined. They see it as emotionally charged, creative and raw.

Others see it as a schizophrenic mess that could have more than half it's pages removed and, only then, be laudable as a very mediocre novella.

Like many things that have a huge following, both parties are correct. I loved the book and thus overlooked its flaws, which are glaring.

If the secondary character of Crow fell off the earth and was eaten by Great Cthulhu, I could not be happier. Apparently nobody told John, that having a bunch of "Hero" characters tends to mess up a simple plot. More than one protagonist is usually workable. But two, genuine, capitol "H" Heroes just wastes time and annoys people. I choked through the secondary plot because I cared what happened to Felix.

The combat scenes were repetitive, but that was on purpose. So I can't help anyone there. If you didn't find it effective, then it wasn't. You're still right and the fans still liked it.

Almost everybody agrees that the ending rocks, even the detractors.

In terms of comparison to the other two oft mentioned members of the "Holy Trinity" of power armor stories: "Starship Troopers" and "Forever War", I think it holds up just fine.

Most negative reviewers will hold one of the other two books up as a Holy Grail of combat sci-fi. That just comes off as pretentious to me. "Starship Troopers" was not that well written, and "Forever War" falls into a weird pretension more often than I would have liked. I enjoyed all three and none of them are Shakespeare...

Armor is fun and dark and has a lot of holes in it. But overall it is my favorite "power armor" novel of all time.

G33z3r says

Solid military scifi focusing on a single young Scout who manages to be sole survivor from his unit in more than one attack. Bug-like aliens and powersuits suggest instant comparison to Heinlein's Starship Troopers, but this version is more PTSD than gung-ho. Divides into sections, with the seemingly abrupt change of protagonist (and date) from Felix to Jack Crow taking awhile to re-connect with Felix's story.

Stephen says

3.0 stars. Certainly deserves to be listed among a handful of classic "military SF" though I rank it below the likes of Starship Troopers and The Forever War. Focuses on the psychological effects of combat and the effect it has on the soldiers fighting it. That alone makes it worth reading. It does have some weaknesses such as the slowness of the middle sections of the book and the occasional lack of quality writing. That said, I still recommend it for military SF fans.

Mike (the Paladin) says

John Steakley was born in 1951, he and I would be almost of an age. He wrote only 2 major novels (the other being VAMPIRE\$ which I plan to read as soon as I can shoehorn it into my reading list). You can see the influence of Vietnam in this one. Written in 1984 the book pictures a 2084 universe where humans have spread through space and Earth is involved in its first interstellar war.

I like this book and found it very involving. I did find my interest waning a bit during our first encounter with Jack but that picks back up quickly and continues to spin out an interesting story. It ends in one of those mystery like endings as the story's tied up but we don't get all the details as to what happened. Apparently Mr. Steakley worked for some years on Armor II but died before he finished it. To bad really.

I don't want to give spoilers here and I don't really need to to say what needs saying. There are some obvious nods of the head to Robert Heinlein's Starship Troopers, while telling a story with its feet firmly planted in a military much like the one many of us in the late '60s through the mid'70s knew. In Starship Troopers the enemy are giant arachnids here they are giant ants. In Starship Troopers the war opens when an asteroid destroys Buenos Aires. In Armor Felix cries out at an ant that they attacked Earth. Earlier when he's asked why he joined up the questioner wants to know if he's from South America. So on and so on. But, where the command structure in Starship Troopers harkens back to WWII and works the command structure in Armor from top (government) all the way down is clueless and inept. As in Vietnam where the troops were thrown into battle in a war there was never any intent to win the troops here are treated as expendable. (If I get started on Nam I'll get long winded. Troops were badmouthed and smeared. The majority of the troops were

not crazed druggies [those were the minority that got all the notice]. The troops ended fighting for each other simply trying to live till the end of their hitch. The same battle being fought repeatedly as they took a hill only to have the brass give it back and then order it retaken again later. Most forget we won the battles. Oh well...moving on). In Armor "Fleet" clearly intends to win the war, but they also pretty much think of the troops as "material" to be used. We follow Felix from his first drop on into the war on Banshee apparently the home world of the Ants.

The story of Felix is actually very enthralling and while the odd twist it gets is just that (a bit odd) it's still very good and I truly wish Mr. Steakley had lived to complete the sequel.

Highly recommended.

Dan Schwent says

An armored scout named Felix is dropped on the planet Banshee, a hostile alien world teeming with Ants. When Felix's team is wiped out on their first mission, only The Engine, his second personality, saves him. Can Felix (and the Engine) survive the war against the Ants? And does he want to...?

I read about Armor on John Scalzi's blog and decided to give it a shot. At first glance, Steakley took the parts of Starship Troopers he liked the most, power armor and aliens that resemble insects, and expanded it into a novel, but Armor is so much more than that.

Armor is the story about what war does to a person's psyche. Felix deals with war by retreating and letting The Engine take control, becoming a veteran and survivor of twenty combat drops. Felix is used to show the absurdity of war. As he becomes a veteran, the people around him, including the ones giving the orders, grow less and less experienced. The contrast between Kent and Felix was well done; one the public face of the war against the Ants and the other the one doing the actual dirty work.

Armor has two distinct plot lines; one featuring Felix and the other featuring a space pirate named Jack Crow, who finds Felix's armor years after the events of Felix's storyline. Felix's story is told in the third person while Crow's is told in the first. I'll be honest, Crow really slowed things down for me and gave me second thoughts about the entire book. At first anyway. Then he found Felix's armor. I loved the way Crow and the others pieced together Felix's fate as the colony slowly collapsed.

The Ants were great enemies in a survival horror type of way. Ten foot tall ant-like aliens are something to be feared, especially when they attack en masse.

I will not give away the ending except to say that it was awesome.

For fans of military sf like Starship Troopers and Old Man's War should give Armor a try. You won't be disappointed.

Wanda says

Roll together Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War*, Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* and Arnold's *Terminator*, and

you get the influences on *Armor*. It must have been part of the zeitgeist of the mid-1980s, as Card's *Ender's Game* was published right around the same time. The suit of armor is its own character, which binds the two bits of the story together. At first, we follow the exploits of semi-superman Felix, as he battles the Ants, an insect-like interstellar enemy of Earth (very like the Buggers of *Ender's Game*). Eventually, we see space-pirate Jack Crow acquire the suit of armor and explore it's stored memories with two scientists on a world that he is supposed to be infiltrating.

It was engaging, although I found the Jack Crow sections to be a bit opaque in meaning. Why did the author switch to his point of view? I'm unsure. And I found long unbroken stretches of text, where it was difficult to find a reasonable place to leave a bookmark, pausing places if you will.

All in all, military science fiction isn't really my thing, although I appreciate the things that it can say about society.

Book 202 of my science fiction & fantasy reading project.

Bill says

I had this one written down on a little piece of paper I keep in my wallet after reading a gushing review at another website. For months I kept an eye open for it until finally it had been re-issued as a classic. It was OK but I'd hardly call it a classic. It does have its moments. While battle scenes begin to bore me after 10 pages, I have to admit these ones were pretty intense. And, yeah, the armor was pretty wild. And, yeah, I did begin to feel for the poor guy. Damn, the more I think about it, the more I start to like it. So why was I so anxious to finish it and move on to something else? I guess Steakley's prose just doesn't quite click with me.

Mark says

A lot of people here have criticized this book because of poor grammar. While it is 100% true that this book is definitely not completely grammar accurate, it should be noted that most of the book is told from the perspective of one of the characters. I didn't think one needed to be grammar accurate if telling the story from the point of view of a character, who is not necessarily an educated person.

If you are a grammar Nazi, you'll probably hate this book. I'm certainly not a grammar Nazi and I loved this book. I like to think that I know reasonably bad grammar when I see it, but I'm often a perpetrator of the crime of bad grammar.

That being said, this was a wonderful book. It is not a re-hash of *Starship Troopers*, so if you go into this novel expecting another book like that then you'll be disappointed.

This book gets into the psyches of its characters. It's an exploration of the nature of heroism, bravery, and excellence. When you come face-to-face with true excellence, do you meet it with admiration, envy, jealousy, or resentment? Maybe you meet it with a bit of all of these.

The Plot:

A man named Felix wears this suit of powered armor to fight in a war against intelligent insects known as "ants". The war is known as the "Antwar". The survival rate for armored troops is very very low. However, Felix excels at killing ants. He does this by reverting to a sort of split personality he calls "the Engine". While he is "the Engine", he can stand the psychological and physical rigors of armored combat.

Right after Felix is introduced, the timeline is instantly jumped forward a few years to a man named Jack Crow. Jack Crow is a space pirate famous for stealing the plans to a revolutionary new spaceship engine. He is also breaking out of prison. He gets passage on a ship off of the prison planet, but it's a pirate ship, and they need fuel badly. The only place they can get fuel is on a remote and under-defended colony planet.

The remote colony is based around a military-funded research lab. The plan is for Jack to use his celebrity status as a famous charismatic pirate to ingratiate himself with the "geeks in charge" and, after he has won their trust, he'll turn off their defenses so that the pirates can swoop in and refuel quickly.

While hiding on the moon of the colony, the pirates show Jack an abandoned ship that they found and agree to give it to him, as well as a substantial sum of money, for helping them. On the abandoned ship, Jack finds an empty suit of powered armor. He decides to use this as a gift to help ingratiate himself with the people in charge on the colony.

The story proceeds from there; going back and forth in time between Felix's experiences in the "Antwar" and Jack Crow's experiences on the colony, and then cleverly links these two plot threads in the end.

My rating:

I loved this book. It's definitely not "hard" sci fi, nor would I call it "literate" sci fi. I would call it a deep space opera. There's a lot of action and plot, but there's also a lot of accurate human psychological motivations and feelings.

"Armor" is by no means a perfect book, however it was the first book I read that really gets into the psychological implications of what one truly feels towards a person who is extraordinary.

One of the characters in "Armor" describes it best when she relates an anecdote from her past. She tells of a dog that her brother owned and of how she let it out one day when she was home alone. The dog fell into a well but, instead of drowning, it kept fighting to stay above water to avoid drowning. Because there was nothing she could do to save the animal, she began to hate it because it was suffering as a result of her mistake, yet surviving DESPITE her mistake. In the same way, Felix survives the absurdities of war, and they hate him for it, because they wouldn't excel and survive as well as Felix did in the same circumstances.
