



## This is How You Die: Stories of the Inscrutable, Infallible, Inescapable Machine of Death

*Ryan North (Editor) , Matthew Bennardo (Editor) , David Malki (Editor) , Nathan Burgoine (Contributor) , Toby W. Rush (Contributor) , Rhiannon Kelly (Contributor) , Ryan Estrada (Contributor) , George Page III (Contributor) , more... Chandler Kaiden (Contributor) , Tom Francis (Contributor) , Grace Seybold (Contributor) , D.L.E. Roger (Contributor) , Daliso Chaponda (Contributor) , John Takis (Contributor) , Ada Hoffmann (Contributor) , Karen Stay Ahlstrom (Contributor) , Gord Sellar (Contributor) , Marleigh Norton (Contributor) , Sarah Pavis (Contributor) , Ren Warom (Contributor) , Liz Argall (Contributor) , John Chernega (Contributor) , Bill Chernega (Contributor) , Richard Salter (Contributor) , Ed Turner (Contributor) , Hollan Lane (Contributor) , Martin Livings (Contributor) , Kyle Schoenfeld (Contributor) , M.J. Leitch (Contributor) , Brigita Orel (Contributor) , Erika Hammerschmidt (Contributor) , Rebecca Black (Contributor) ...less*

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If a machine could predict how you would die, would you want to know? This is the tantalizing premise of *This Is How You Die*, the brilliant follow-up anthology to the self-published best seller, *Machine of Death*. The machines started popping up around the world. The offer was tempting: With a simple blood test, anyone could know how they would die. But the machines didn't give dates or specific circumstances - just a single word or phrase. DROWNED, CANCER, OLD AGE, CHOKED ON A HANDFUL OF POPCORN. And though the predictions were always accurate, they were also often frustratingly vague. OLD AGE, it turned out, could mean either dying of natural causes, or being shot by an elderly, bedridden man in a botched home invasion. The machines held on to that old-world sense of irony in death: You can know how it's going to happen, but you'll still be surprised when it does.

This addictive anthology - sinister, witty, existential, and fascinating - collects the best of the thousands of story submissions the editors received in the wake of the success of the first volume, and exceeds the first in every way.

Length: 15 hrs and 38 mins  
Unabridged Audiobook

### **This is How You Die: Stories of the Inscrutable, Infallible, Inescapable Machine of Death Details**

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## From Reader Review This is How You Die: Stories of the Inscrutable, Infallible, Inescapable Machine of Death for online ebook

### Ralph Pulner says

The most gorgeous arrangement of a short story book I have ever seen. Stories, illustrations, comics, childrens books and choose your own adventure! Every story connected with me, ranging from good to great. Light hearted, whimsical, comedic, to horror, psychological and philosophical. I recommend for anyone who lays awake at night, worried about how they die.

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### Benito Corral says

In 2010, there was quite a lot of buzz around a new anthology entitled Machine of Death which collected stories exploring a single premise; a machine that could predict, without fail, the manner in which you would die. All it needed was a sample of your blood and a tiny slip of paper would have your ultimate fate written on it. I myself never read it but definitely had it on the ever growing TBR pile. Then this year, the editors unleashed upon the world a sequel, This Is How You Die: Stories of the Inscrutable, Infallible, Inescapable Machine of Death. Word of mouth was that this volume was even bigger, better and not to be missed. So I gave in to the siren song, threw caution to the wind and picked up This Is How You Die.

The collection opens with the heartbreakingly brilliant Old Age, Surrounded by Loved Ones by 'Nathan Burgoine. Burgoine is now on my list of go-to writers that I know will deliver a great story; I have yet to be disappointed. Also, the story wasn't what I expected at all; Burgoine has written an emotional story about sisters that will require tissues after reading it. If you're not teary eyed after this, then you have no heart to break.

Other favorites:

Execution by Beheading by Chandler Kaiden is a thriller that features three children who, upon hearing a rumor about someone who is different, go to extremes to collect a rare "Cause Of Death" card from their machine...

Apitoxin is a very clever spin on the book's premise by John Takis, who places his tale right in the hands of none other than Sherlock Holmes. Apitoxin is both a wonderful tribute to the famous detective and a well written mystery that was great fun to read.

Monsters from the Deep, editor David Malki !'s contribution to the anthology, is a weird, creepy tale complete with aliens and a delightful Lovecraftian atmosphere.

Lake Titicaca by editor Matthew Bennardo instantly reminded me of The Body and Goonies, with kids a little afraid of what they're doing but too excited not to go off and have an adventure.

Be warned: This Is How You Die is indeed a long book but the stories are so varied and encompass so many genres that you will continually be pulled along to keep reading, unwilling to put the book down. And with a collection like this, that is exactly what you want; great story after great story that keeps you glued to the page til the last sentence is read.

Then you start over again.

Happy reading!

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## Jessica says

This book is a LOT of fun. I read the Machine of Death collection, and loved it, so when I saw this one go up for pre-order I jumped on it. And I can't \*wait\* to get my copy of the card game from Kickstarter.

The premise of the stories in the book is fairly simple: there is a machine that takes a bit of your blood and then tells you how you'll die. Except, it's not really straightforward. The machine seems to enjoy being cryptic or poetic sometimes.

The first book focused a lot on stories of people getting their readings and reacting, or people trying to beat the machine when they got results they didn't like. The stories in this book go in all kinds of different directions, from alternate universes, putting the machine in historical settings, introducing aliens, and showing ways the machine can be used for bad or good or grey reasons. It definitely freshened up the concept of a Machine of Death.

Surprisingly, it's not as morbid as you'd think. It's not gory or horrific, except sometimes in the ways that people abuse knowledge. You'd expect a book titled "THIS IS HOW YOU DIE" to be all doom and gloom, but it's really not.

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## Nick says

The original Machine of Death: A Collection of Stories About People Who Know How They Will Die was impressive, but as promised, this book is bigger and better in every way. You've got settings from post-zombie-apocalypse to distant-future to high fantasy; genres from humor to mystery (Sherlock Holmes fan fiction, no less); tones ranging from the lightest adolescent comedy to the darkest philosophical thriller. Every story explores something different, whether it's what the machine is, how it works, how it's used, or just a different culture's view of it. Much like Ryan North's own Dinosaur Comics, it takes what you would imagine to be limitations ("write about this very specific machine") and stretches them in fantastic directions you wouldn't have thought possible. Granted, some of the stories are only so-so, but average is the *worst* this book has to offer. You should read it.

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## Mikki says

I'm not a big fan of anthologies, because most of the time the story quality varies and sometimes you plow through a story just to get to the next. Not so in this book. Not a single story fails to draw you into its little world. I'm amazed at how all the writers took a single theme and ran with it, in extremely different directions.

From fantasy tales, to sci-fi adventures, to zombie apocalypse stories, to military accounts -- hell, even the superhero genre gets a shot. There's a choose your own adventure story, a story where humans have all died out and an alien race investigates our remains, a story that takes you back to pre-Revolution France, and a

story about a vending machine that's vaguely Lovecraftian in tone. It's an incredibly mixed bag, all revolving around a common and compelling theme -- death. The stories look at how society accepts or rejects knowing one's death, how people change and react to knowing how their lives will end. All wildly interesting stories about the only universal constant - death.

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## **Thom says**

The original premise and collection of stories were quite good, leading the editors to seek submissions for a sequel. All told, 1958 new stories (and 151 art folios) were submitted. This new volume represents the best of those, and is also very good.

Authors branched a little further from the original theme - a machine which can tell you how (but not when) you are going to die. My favorites were "ZEPHYR" by George Page III (Space marines form into fighting units coordinated by the times of their impending deaths) and "CANCER" by editor Ryan North (A terminal patient discovers that her prediction may not be as straightforward as it seems at first). Perhaps one of the most clever stories was "TWO ONE SIX" by Marleigh Norton (A woman struggles to unravel the relevance of her numerical prediction).

My favorite from the first collection was also authored by Ryan North - I will have to seek out more of his stories to read - including Dinosaur Comics, which I confess I have never read.

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## **Matt says**

First of all, let me mention a minor disclaimer on my star rating: I would prefer to give this 4.5 stars instead of a full 5. Usually in this case, I round down. With this collection, however, there really isn't a single story I didn't like - all of them either entertained me or engaged me (usually both at the same time). For that, it gets 5 stars.

This Is How You Die is the sequel anthology to Machine of Death, both of which collect a number of stories that take place in a world that features the Machine of Death, a machine which predicts when you'll die, but not how, and often through ironic or cryptic phrases.

In my review on Goodreads for Machine of Death, I offered one word of advice: read that collection, then immediately buy this one. Why? Because this collection is so damn creative! This Is How You Die fully shows off the range of stories that can be inspired by one simple premise. Henchmen for an evil scientist use death predictions to kill supposedly unkillable soldiers. Humanity discovers alien life - and quickly wonders if the machine can predict how our alien benefactors will die. A doctor at work in Africa uses the predictions to hunt a serial killer. A Machine of Death analyst accidentally discovers the end of the world. A choose-your-own adventure story revolves around a man whose death prediction reads, "Your Choice." Sherlock Holmes uses a cryptic prediction to solve a crime. And that's only a handful of stories.

The ideas in this collection are fantastic, poetic, terrifying, whimsical, clever, and heartfelt. Every story transports you to a brilliant and detailed new story world, and the end of each story leaves you simultaneously wanting more of that world and hungering for the next one. There isn't a single person I wouldn't recommend this unique anthology to.

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## Nathan Burgoine says

When I found out that the first story was mine, I may have "squeed."

Now I said I wouldn't chat about my own tales in this Short Stories 365 project so onward:

"Rock and Roll," by Toby Rush

In a world where everyone can learn how they're going to die, the results can have a cachet of their own. Some fans of a rock star win a chance to spend time with him, and one girl has a very real reason to want to spend time with the icon. The sheer cleverness of Toby Rush's story blew me away - I loved the idea behind it, and the world crafted around the fallout of knowing - I think my favourite stories from these collections are the ones that take the sociological implications of the machines and run with them.

"Natural Causes," by Rhiannon Kelly

This was a great tale for the collection, and once again a completely different vibe than the other stories - I can't express that often enough with this anthology, so I'll say it again: the writers all seemed to find different directions to explore with the Death Machine. In this case, the social strata of High School gets a quick shake up when a Death Machine finally comes to a small town, and there's soon a division between those who've gotten a slip, and those who haven't. And then, when one has a slip, it's what's written on it that has even more important: a cool death, after all, is, y'know, cool.

So when the heroine of the tale gets her slip and her result is definitely not cool? Well, that's where the story takes shape. Even better, the ending is a wonderful twist that made me laugh out loud.

Did I mention this story was written by high school student (at the time, I mean, she got older since then and graduated and stuff)? I mean this as a sincere compliment: I would not have known until I read the bio.

"Shiv Sena Riot," by Ryan Estrada

I already knew I loved Ryan Estrada (in a cool literary way, since I'm married to my wonderful husband, and I'm pretty sure Ryan would have better taste in guys than me if he liked guys). He wrote Aki Alliance which I found at random one day on the internet and that led to other comics and before I knew it I was kickstarting his projects and then I had so much awesome comic goodness coming into my house that my husband raised an eyebrow until I pointed at his LEGO collection and it was a stalemate.

Uh. Where was I?

Right. Ryan Estrada. Estrada's story in This is How You Die is told from the point of view of one of Manisha, a Death Machine call centre support worker. She takes the calls from the worried, the scared, the disbelieving, and everyone else, and helps them come to terms with what they've just learned. Manisha, being in India, hasn't taken the test herself - they're not quite illegal, but not plentiful like elsewhere.

Estrada's setting and Manisha's mother's cultural traditions give the story a clever counterpoint, and the story's progression has a wonderful zig and zag to it. I didn't suspect where we would end up, and was delighted by the journey.

And - again - this story was yet another example of how the single connecting thread of the death machine can be woven in a completely different way. The range these stories cover is just bloody brilliant.

"Zephyr," by George Page III

When a story in the anthology explores how society (and, in this case, government and the military) would be influenced by the death machine, I really dig it. Adding in a specific feel to the tale by moving forward through the years? Even better. George Page III takes a crew of marines and deploys them in a way that feels right for a world where everyone has some information about how they die.

I didn't see the twist coming, I loved the whole notion of how various battalions are put together, and the smooth humour of one of the characters and his smug-satisfaction of his death machine result was a welcome counterpoint. This is a great story, and I'm being a bit vague here because I don't want to reveal too much of the world-building Page has done. Suffice it to say I really enjoyed it.

"Execution by Beheading," by Chandler Kaiden

This one is so damn clever. In the various worlds of This is How You Die, some of the authors really went to town figuring out ways the death machine would impact the cultures of the world. This story, by Chandler Kaiden, does an amazing job of this - here, kids collect "cod cards" (cause of death) and try to build collections that are varied and, being kids, grisly. When two kids hear a rumour that a man living in one of their buildings got "Execution by Beheading," they enact a plan to steal some of his blood so they can run the test again and collect the cod card.

And things don't go as planned at all.

"LAZARUS REACTOR FISSION SEQUENCE," by Tom Francis

Okay. This story? I freaking loved it. It's part Bond, part Archer, part Christopher Moore circa Dirty Job, all painted with the wonderful strokes of Tom Francis, who made me laugh out loud multiple times throughout. When a supervillian (okay, well, more like a radical inventor of a new fission technology that seems to have pissed off the world governments) keeps getting invaded by soldiers who want to stop him, he hires henchmen, right? Except, well, in the world of the Death Machine, if those soldiers have been tested and their slips say, for example, "Banana Peel," then there's just no way any amount of henchmen with guns is going to take that soldier down.

Enter a special henchman, who tells this tale, and is tasked with taking captured agents and using their test results to ensure they don't mess with the boss's plan to finish the reactor. He's creative. He's a total nerd. He's completely tongue-tied around the lady who runs the diagnostic tests on the prisoners. And he's hysterical.

Thank you, Tom Francis. Seriously. Virginia Falls? Oh. Man.

"Drowning Burning Falling Flying," by Grace Seybold

Oh man! This is a third story from This is How You Die and if I can say something about the collection as a whole when only at the third story, it's this: they're all so different from each other. I love when an anthology holds to a theme and yet has such diversity within.

This story is very specific - aliens have arrived on our world, representing a union of alien species, and they're very intrigued by the Death Machine. This is a device unique to humanity, and the aliens want to take the test. The fallout between the scientist working with the aliens, and a linguist who is helping translate the science the aliens possess is brilliant. My hat is off to Grace Seybold. Wonderful story.

"Conflagration," by Ian Stoner, writing as D.L.E. Roger

The best part of this second volume of stories about the ineffable Machine of Death for me is the way the stories really finish with a bang, and found new ways to weave the machine either into the sociology and culture of the world the writer crafted. In this case, with "Conflagration," the keystone of the story is in the hands of the wife of a man who is feeling his life - and marriage - creep away from him. She is a sifter of data, who has come up with a model to use the machine of death results to make predictions that lead to interventions - mathematical formulas to note when there are clusters of results linked to disease outbreaks, for example, might predict a future epidemic, and inoculations - while too late for those who will already die - might save the impact against larger populations as yet unborn (and untested). Basically, she uses the results of others to try and stave off what doesn't have to be a larger outbreak.

But when she discovers a different pattern, that's when things turn, and D.L.E. Roger's wonderful story delivers one of those crack endings I was talking about earlier. I won't spoil it, but I loved it - which has become the theme of this anthology so far.

"SCREAMING, CRYING, ALONE, AND AFRAID," by Daliso Chaponda

Oh man this one was good. First, although this is a contemporary story and more-or-less a murder mystery, it's set in Zimbabwe, and the characters and culture involved spin the story differently than if it had been, say, downtown New York. I also loved the offhanded comment about the political race - it had never occurred to me that in a world full of Death Machines, revealing your result said something heroic would be a pathway to political gain.

The twist to this tale is having an investigator who decides to try - and succeeds - at testing the blood of murder victims, and in so doing wants to try to glean some information to track down what might be Zimbabwe's first serial killer. The story is an excellent example of how uniquely the various authors are taking the Death Machine conceit, and going in unique directions.

"Apitoxin," by John Takis

I love, love, love this story. John Takis (who wrote stories for some of the Strange New Worlds Star Trek anthologies) takes the Death Machine and pops it into a Sherlock Holmes mystery. Cleverly written, the story spins around the device itself - is it a real device, is it a part of something more sinister? And, of course, Watson tells the tale.

Takis does Watson's voice beautifully, and I couldn't help but geek out all the way through it. I've said it before, and often, but the range of stories in this collection go in so many different directions from that one commonality of the death machine. Damn I'm proud to be a part of this anthology.

"Blue Fever," by Ada Hoffmann

One of the things that's really been enjoyable about all the tales released from *This is How You Die* so far is the range of settings. Speculative fiction from the future, contemporary, and now, with Ada Hoffmann's "Blue Fever," a more fantastical story, where clockwork servants tidy up at great feasts where lords and ladies meet to arrange alliances, and minstrels sing morbid songs of the ruler's death predictions as a form of entertainment.

"Blue Fever" puts us alongside one of these minstrels, who - in a kind of Scheherazade way - comes up with new potential tales, which she puts to verse, to explain a somewhat dull response of "Glass" as the eventual end of her lord's life. Were she to displease him with a song, her life is likely forfeit. But when he tasks her with a new topic, for a reason she understands could be deadly to her, what words can she find?

"Tetrapod," by Rebecca Black

Oh how I loved this story, which is about two teachers in Japan, and their bittersweet relationship and their awareness of how children act in a world where knowing how you die is now rolled into something in the realm of icebreakers. I keep saying this about this anthology, but it's the clever way that the authors have melded the culture of the Death Machine into the narrative that's really giving the collection its edge for me.

Teaching English, having strong feelings for a married man, and trying to connect to children who don't yet see what a shadow death is is all juggled deftly with a story that unfolds almost gently - right up until a dark moment to tips everything on its side and leaves the reader breathless. Rebecca Black, that was wonderful.

"Machine of Death," by Karen Stay Ahlstrom

This is another story in This is How You Die where the author does something so bloody clever that I grin from ear-to-ear. This story approaches the death machine sideways - a young woman is invited to something that's quickly becoming a bit of a fad - a Machine of Death party! There are all manner of party games that happen around this death machine, and though the young woman who attends the party is skeptical (and a little put off by the morbidity of it all). But as the story progresses, the reader starts to realize that there's something far darker at play here, and something is off.

The reality of the story is one that sent a shiver up my spine, and I have to say it was so damn effective in setting me up as the reader for the unpleasant (and oh so devilish) surprise. Brava, Karen Stay Ahlstrom. Brava!

"Monsters from the Deep," by David Malki !

So. Damn. Creepy.

This story features two pilots who have - thanks to autopilot - a heck of a lot of time on their hands with which to pursue other interests. In the case of one of these pilots, "other interests" comes down to the predictions from the yellow machines (death machines) and how, for some reason, they seem to be growing more and more violent. There are charts, and intelligent discussions, and - in the way of the subtle horror that slides into my brain the best - a slow and menacing build of "otherness" that erupts, finally, in a horrifying conclusion.

It's often hard to discuss these stories since I'm trying my level best to spoil nothing. In this case, I really can't explain much more than that vagueness above, but I will say that David Malki ! has quite a few turns of phrases in here that made me grimace and twitch. There's a lot of texture to this story, and the horror really does bring to mind that sense of "otherness" so common to H.P. Lovecraft or Shirley Jackson.

"Toxoplasmosis of the Brain; Candidiasis of the Esophagus; Candidiasis of the Trachia; Candidiasis of the Bronchi; Candidiasis of the Lungs; Kaposi's Sarcoma; Pneumonia; Tuberculosis; Stab Wound in the Belly; and Bus Accident," by Gord Sellar

This was a story that was just so damned easy to imagine. I'm faced - again - with not wanting to ruin anything from the story and still explain how good this was to you. So, I'll try to walk the line. This tale takes the prejudice and fear and stigma of a disease and takes it to a horrifying - but, again, completely imaginable - place. It is not a terrifying story in and of itself, but the sickness in the bottom of my stomach came from that feeling that this was speculative fiction in its strongest form: that it did, in a way, serve as a warning. That this reality is not so far-fetched. Or at least, that was my feeling throughout this tale, but perhaps by virtue of who I am and my life experiences, this struck so close to home.

This story - this incredible story - is so damned well done in that this larger picture is seen through the lens of a woman who has been betrayed in one sense, but is a betrayer in another. Her character is phenomenal. The story is phenomenal. Damn. Okay. Out of words.

"Cancer," by Ryan North

Oh, this story rocks so freaking hard.

First, the couple are just adorkable (that's like being adorable but also being a dork, which is a pretty neat intersection, but all the cooler because you could describe it best with a Venn diagram).

Second, the dialog is brilliant. I'm always in awe of people who can give their characters such, uh, character with a few turns of phrase or speech patterns. The adorkable couple are facing some pretty rough stuff, but the approach of Helen in the face of such dark things is humor. Grave humor is my take on things that hit hard, so it was super-easy to relate to her. Also, I'm a dork, so I feel like I share one circle of her Venn diagram.

Third, and most important - SCIENCE! The science of this story, and the circumstances of this story, are in the realm of the very plausible because dude, it like totally already happened! Only without a machine of death. And to someone else. In a different way. But! SCIENCE!

You'll laugh. You'll sniffle. You'll freaking learn SCIENCE!

"Two One Six," by Marleigh Norton

This next story in the anthology is another example of solid speculative fiction that has its seed in the Death Machine and goes in a completely different direction than any of the other stories. Clever with the repeating motif of the prediction in question - "Two One Six" - the story takes place at regular intervals (216 seconds after birth, 216 minutes after birth, 216 hours after birth, etc...) ratcheting up the tension in a unique way and telling a story that has a great sense of bait-and-switch that repeats over and over throughout, even as the reader gets more and more caught up trying to figure out what the "Two One Six" might indicate.

This story was smart science fiction, and I do love me a good (and smart) science fiction story. Cheers, Marleigh Norton.

Also, can I just shout out how fantastic the illustration for this story is? Shari Chankhamma, that's gorgeous.

"Blunt Force Trauma Delivered by Spouse," by Liz Argall

Oh wow is this story incredibly well done.

Okay, without ruining anything (which gets hard to do with these stories), here's the general set-up of this story: a woman learns via her death machine test that her spouse will be the death of her, via blunt force trauma. The quandry is the same for many of those who get the test: the machine is never wrong, but is there something that can be done? This woman's life unfolds for the reader, and her character is one of the most well-written and deeply empathetic beings I've read in a long time. She lives and breathes on the page, and the slowly rising tension of what decisions she will make - if any - was an amazing experience.

I won't lie - this was an incredibly hard story to read. Argall did that good a job of it. But damn, it was well done, and I left it incredibly moved and a little disturbed.

"Meat Eater," by John Chernega and Bill Chernega

Let's just pause for a moment here and allow our minds to boggle over the idea of trying to produce a piece of creative art with a sibling, shall we?

Yeah.

That.

John and Bill Chernega's story in This is How You Die is actually a booklet/pamphlet that the government has produced to help parents explain to their children what's ahead for them when they go for their mandatory "Big CODT Machine" visit at age six. The presentation - complete with illustrations - reminds me of every pamphlet I was ever handed as a kid that showed some young fellow (in this case, Jimmy) nervous about some impending unpleasantness like going to the dentist or what-not. He has three buddies with him (three stuffed dinosaurs) and between the four of them, Jimmy will of course learn about what's about to happen and maybe conquer his fears.

The real cleverness of the story, of course, is the tone and delivery, which hints at the society that created this pamphlet. Why would we force kids of six to learn how they are going to die? The whole reminded me a bit of Fallout, if you've ever played the game. The tone is delightfully spry, even though the context is incredibly dark.

"Made into Delicious Cheeseburger," by Sarah Pavis

Okay - how to write a review of something that's probably shorter than any review I might write? This story is - as is obvious from the (truly cool) illustration that goes with it - about a cow. It references a line from the original Dinosaur Comics about cows, and of all the tales in This is How You Die, it's the one that made me laugh the loudest. Short. Sweet. Clever.

And cheesy.

"Your Choice," by Richard Salter

Okay, first off, the level of joy I used to get from reading Choose Your Own Adventure books (and their various other incarnations, including Find the Path, Pick a Path, the Fighting Fantasy books and so on and so on) can not be overstated before I begin this review. So consider it stated in many mile-high letters twinkling brighter than unicorn blood or whatever twinkles really bright but will function like paint.

Got it?

This is totally one of those types of stories but with the Machine of Death!

This means you get to re-read, and re-read, and re-read this story and get narratives. That is pretty freaking cool. And even better, the various paths gave me that nostalgic thrill. Will I go to 2? Will I go to 13? Either way, I'll go there giddy, happy to have the trip, and wondering if I can make the right choice next time...

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## Domashita Romero says

Just as good as the first collection. As with any anthology, your enjoyment of any given story will depend on taste, but the stories come from such a broad variety of genres, interpretations, and moods that there's a lot of

good tastes to try. The one written by editor Ryan North made me cry on the subway. What a JERK. I loved it.

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## Cheryl says

I won this book as a Goodreads giveaway, which I entered because it sounded like a quirky read. It was much different from what I was expecting.

First off, I have to say that I am still not sure if I would want to know how and/or when I am going to die, even if the prediction includes a play on words, as some do. Quite a few of the stories discuss that question in terms of whether it will allow you to be at peace and get on with doing what you want/need to do or whether it will be a burden that changes your fate.

Second, this book is a marvelous study aid if you are an aspiring or even published writer. Who would have thought there could be so many ways of writing a story based on the idea of a machine that tells how you will die? To that end, the first story in the book is a lovely way to begin (though, this being an anthology, you can skip around and read them in any order that works for you), because it is a simple story about love and family and choices -- no sci-fi/fantasy, futuristic, doomsday, or technical aspects at all. Other selections include a story featuring Sherlock Holmes, a choose-your-own-path story, a great comic take on the ironies of death featuring a self-proclaimed henchman, a story involving zombies, one that covers the French Revolution, one that is really reminiscent of Bradbury's *Dandelion Wine*, one addressing the AIDS crisis in Africa, and one that pays homage to Henrietta Lacks.

Did I like all of the stories? Actually, 95% of them at least. One left me rather puzzled, in part due to the style and in part due to the internal world being a little lacking in background (esp since I am not a huge fantasy/sci-fi reader), but even then it was good. The illustrations are really well done in that graphic novel style that works so well with the subject matter. All in all, a truly impressive compilation. I will keep a lookout for the original collection of stories, *The Machine of Death*, because I am curious what other ways the concept can be interpreted.

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## Christian says

Briefly: [This is How You Die](#) is based on a card game, the Machine of Death. Maybe the other way around. And I think this is actually volume 2, after a previous book of stories about the Machine of Death. The Machine in question is a philosophic concept: a device is able to accurately predict the means of your demise, rendered in a terse, sometimes wryly ambiguous phrase.

The question this book of short stories addresses is: how would your life change, knowing how (but not when) you're going to die? The answer is infallible, so even if your death is "gunshot", for example, and you manage to eliminate all guns within a 600-mile radius, the Machine will still be right and Fate and semantics will convolute and connive to ensure your flame is snuffed in the technically appropriate manner.

Prior to giving the matter any thought, one might be lulled into assuming that knowing the means of one's end answers at least one sufficiently large question, when in fact, it only cracks open a case of fresh, new, previously unknown questions. [This is How You Die](#) is a collection of short stories from writers and artists, depicting all the insane and improbable ways the specific death visits each recipient. Seeing your death coming at you is uncomfortable. An ambiguously worded death doesn't answer any questions at all. A

guarantee of a long-term death still colors the worldview of the recipient. And even if you don't opt to learn the path of your termination, how do you deal with a loved one who does?

All these stories, these brilliant, well-rendered short stories approach this one premise, the death-predicting Machine, from myriad angles and perspectives. The stories take place in all nations, all up and down the timeline, spanning urban fantasy to sci-fi/fantasy. There is no limit to the creativity manifest in these tales; the thinking reader will pause and boggle over these crowdsourced stories (my understanding is the three editors sifted through entries and submissions to pick out their favorite hundred or so), all the permutations considered, the various ways meaning and syntax may be spun and split. Best, and worst, of all is watching the all-to-real characters reel with the impact of their revelations, then stumble to make sense of the new world opened unto them.

There's some laughter here. There's a lot of pain and a lot of tension. There's amazement at the sheer talent this tome comprises. I must issue a personal caveat: I wasn't halfway through the book before it began to tint my dreams. I've had a week of Machine of Death dreams, which is partially fun but mostly dreadful, where my own death is limned or that of someone close to me and I can only watch them totter off to their destiny. Maybe there's a story in it. Regardless, it behooves anyone who appreciates a good yarn to read [This is How You Die](#): there are so very many short stories bound up here, so many scintillating ideas swirling around such a compelling, provocative premise. I'm over halfway through and I haven't read a bad story yet. (There was one I didn't understand and a couple I couldn't relate to, but even they were still great.)

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### **Tasha Robinson says**

Even better than the last collection of stories about the idea of a Machine Of Death, which can tell you how you're going to die, but not when, or what its often opaque predictions actually mean. All the writers interpret the idea differently and make up their own worlds around this central idea, but this time out, the interpretations have a lot more range: more creativity, more playfulness, more surprises. I did a full review for *The A.V. Club* (not yet published), so I won't go into huge detail here, but I will say that some of these stories have really stuck with me. Particularly the one about the creative-death technician working for a supervillain, and ensuring that all the super-spies who break into the villain's island lair can be killed, even if their Machine Of Death slips predict seemingly non-violent ends. Or the one about the singer in the technofuture who makes her living by composing flattering songs about what her patron's not-very-informative death slip might mean. I'm often pretty dubious about anthologies, which usually seem to come with a lot of dross, but this one actually held me.

Full review here: <http://www.avclub.com/articles/ryan-n...>

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### **Brigita says**

I loved the first collection of stories in the series, Machine of Death. I expected something similar of this book. But I was utterly surprised. In a good way!

Where the stories in the first collection focused mainly on humour and surprise twists, this second volume is so eclectic and amazing that it is hard to describe it with just a few words. In a book where all the stories share the same premise one would expect the same topics and themes being repeated ad infinitum. Not so in This is how you die. The scope of themes, the styles, the narratives are so diverse that I do not envy the editors that had to read hundreds of stories and pick just a few to include in the collection. Their work must

have been difficult.

The subject matters range from heartbreaking in such stories as 'Old age, surrounded by loved ones' or 'Blunt force trauma delivered by spouse', to hilarious as in 'Meat eater', speculative in 'Drowning burning falling flying', 'Not applicable' or 'Toxoplasmosis of the brain', shocking as in 'Execution by beheading' to Sherlock Holmes making an appearance in 'Apitoxin'. We even get a peek into the pre-Revolution Paris in 'La mort d'un roturier'. All these stories, and plenty of others, are a delight to read.

Disclaimer: I am a contributing author in this collection.

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## Kate says

I hadn't read the first volume when I started this, but the introduction sets the premise up pretty clearly.

There wasn't a story in here that I didn't enjoy! The only distinction is which ones I liked **most**.

Francis's "Lazarus Reactor Fission Sequence" is hands down the top favorite. *Hilarious*. If you liked Soon I Will be Invincible, pick the book up for that one alone. And then read the rest.

Malki !'s "Monsters from the Deep" both made me glad I no longer fill vending machines at work and convinced me to never, ever eat anything from one again.

North's "Cancer" was also hilarious--it's impossible not to love Helen and Tina--while also being powerful and a nice bit of reality-tied scifi (North discusses the case of Henrietta Lacks and the HeLa cells in a coda to it).

Warom's "In Sleep" is one of the few where I really wished there were more to the story--the world its set in seemed so lush and delightful that it was a shame to leave it. Warom's writing style took a little adjusting to at first (less than Norton's "Two One Six," though--I'm not right-brained enough to feel that I really got that one), but it works very well for the striking innocence that Pome gives.

Hammerschmidt's "Furnace" was an excellent, **excellent** play on audience awareness versus character awareness, and she used it to great effect for both humor and making you wince.

The comics are a little harder to judge, given how short they are; but Green's "Bear" and "Unwise Decision" and Straub's "Bite Wound" were the ones that made me snicker most.

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## Amy says

This is how you die: HEART ATTACK, CANCER, PEACEFULLY, OLD AGE, SURROUNDED BY LOVED ONES. No matter what your slip reads, however, the machine that spat it out is infallible. This **is** how you die. There is no indication as to when it will happen, and the reading may be frustratingly ambiguous, but there is no escaping it.

In each of these stories, the author examines a world in which a machine has been invented that predicts your death. In some worlds, the machine has been seamlessly accepted and incorporated into daily life. Babies are tested at birth. In others, the government has mandated children be tested at age six for 'national security'

purposes. In yet other possible realities, use of the machine is purely by choice. Would you use this machine? Would you want to know?

Some especially 'notable deaths' are nestled between this book's covers. The first story by Nathan Burgoine was particularly poignant and noteworthy. In *Old Age, Surrounded by Loved Ones*, the special and loving bond between twin sisters will leave you with a lump in your throat and mist in your eyes.

In *Execution By Beheading* by Chandler Kaiden we join a group of children as they choose to take fate into their own hands in order to get a rare and prized C.O.D. (Cause of Death) card for their collection. If you can sit through this story without releasing a tortured moan from between clenched teeth, you've got a spine of steel.

*Drowning Burning Falling Flying* by Grace Seybold is a science fiction offering with an interesting twist, *Meat Eater* by John Chernega and Bill Chernega is a 'parent's guide for having a frank, honest discussion with their children about cause of death testing (CODT)' provided by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and *Apitoxin* by John Takis is a Sherlock Holmes tale written so well that you'll imagine Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote it himself.

In a collection in which death is the meat and potatoes, *Lake Titicaca* by M. Bennardo was a delightfully cool and zesty palate cleanser and *La Mort D'Un Roturier* by Martin Livings was a decadent, wicked dessert. For those finding themselves a little weighed down in between courses, the stories come interspersed with cartoons. I especially enjoyed the one at the very end which prompted this book and its predecessor, **Machine of Death**.

I'm so glad these books were brought to my attention. Normally I'm not a huge fan of short stories. At best I find that no sooner have I immersed myself in the story, they're ending and I'm left feeling cheated somehow. At worst, I finish the story no more enlightened to what the author was trying to convey as when I began. This is not the case in these collections. Each one stands alone and tells (or at least hints at) a full story. There were offerings from nearly every genre of writing, even a fantasy tale, *In Battle, Alone, and Soon Forgotten* by Ed Turner, which had a surprising socio-political message.

I think this is why this collection of stories works so well: while the big picture is death, these stories often carry a subtler message. It is also why I hope to see another collection released in the (hopefully) not too distant future.

If a machine could predict how you would die . . . would you want to know? No, no I wouldn't, but I certainly enjoy reading short stories about it! :)

I registered a book at BookCrossing.com!  
<http://www.BookCrossing.com/journal/12079774>

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## Tom says

In every way this book improves upon the first, **Machine of Death**. The amount of imagination on display here is mindblowing. The authors take the death-prediction-machine idea and place it into contexts as varied as:

- a military SF setting
- a spy/supervillain setting (hilarious story)

- an alien contact story which introduces weird quantum/parallel worlds concepts
- a murder mystery in Zimbabwe
- a Sherlock Holmes tale
- a clockworkpunk/Victorian-ish fantasy world
- a Lovecraftian horror story
- a story that starts out in the present day but has a twist featuring artificial intelligence
- a Choose Your Own Adventure story (hard to navigate on Kindle though)
- a whimsical childrens' picture book
- a gritty fantasy world with orcs and elves and goblins
- a futuristic social SF setting where your death prediction can be stolen (great twist in this one)
- a historical fiction story set in pre-revolution France (with a nasty final reveal)
- a dystopian future dictatorship
- a zombie apocalypse
- a far future, post-human world where archaeologists uncover an ancient Machine of Death, but some hilarious mistranslations occur

Clearly an incredible list. All those stories incorporate the Machine of Death into their worlds in clever ways, and continually surprise you.

The anthology also has its share of more mundane stories, set in our modern world, but they use the Machine of Death in a variety of ways that keeps it all very fresh. There are surprises and brilliant ideas on nearly every page. In fact, while most of my favourite stories were genre-flavoured (see above list), some of my other favourites were simple character studies set in our world.

Two particularly excellent stories of the "mundane" variety are one involving prison camps to hold people with certain death predictions in eastern Africa, and one about an Australian woman who knows she will one day die at the hands of her spouse, and the choices she then makes. Amazing stories.

This is a stunning anthology, with such a strong and original concept, that links every story together but allows for the craziest variety. There was only one outright bad story ("Tetrapod") but the rest more than made up for it. If you've never read the original **Machine of Death**, my recommendation would be to skip straight to this collection. It's the better of the two. You can go back and read the first one afterwards. You will not read a science fiction anthology with such clever ideas as this for a long time.

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## Eric Mesa says

This book was more than just more stories in the Machine of Death world. It was also the Machine of Death in fantasy worlds and science fiction worlds and all kinds of creative new worlds. It was a lot of fun and a great followup to the first book.

As usual with anthologies, here are my status updates (at least one per story) with some possible changes to what I wrote at the time.

Old Age, Surrounded by Loved Ones: I think this was the first of these stories that revolved around this particular family-based twist. I thought the ending was pretty touching.

Rock and Roll: I feel like this guy was mentioned in passing in the first anthology. I liked the twist.

Natural Causes: The MOD arrives in small town USA. Nice twist in that the Machine was a fake.

**Shiv Sena Riot:** A nice variation on the story that last time had a tech's log. This time it's a call center woman in India. Enjoying it so far. Great juxtaposition of the Machine of Death vs the predictive arts in that part of India. I loved the ending, even if the title leads one to speculate on what happens

**Zephyr:** Very different than anything in the other book. Space Marines have figure out a parabolic curve of when you're most likely to die. If you are far from it - you have 0% chance of dying. If in it, you can die at any time. I'm going to guess that perhaps they're lying to these soldiers and they don't all die on the 4th. But I'll be happy to be proven wrong. **Zephyr:** I was somewhat right in my prediction, but the twist was still a really good one.

**Death by beheading:** a tragic look at how kids often fail to see the consequences of their actions when peer pressure is on the line

**Lazarus Fusion Reactor:** A great story told from the point of view of Supervillain Henchmen. I would love to read more in this universe.

**Drowning Flying etc:** I guessed the multiverse twist right away. Waiting to see if the ending has a further twist. OK ending

**Conflagration:** I like the idea of a psych office who's job it is to convince you that you don't actually want to know your results. Quite a different world from the kiosk death machine world. What if you could somehow prevent mass-scale deaths by changing the situation before people are born, and, therefore, tested?

**Screaming, Crying, alone...:** A murder mystery in Zimbabwe. Very nice and I didn't catch the killer early.

**Apitoxin:** A Steam-Punk Machine of Death and Sherlock Holmes! I love it! A great argument for the cultural value of public domain characters

**Blue Fever:** What seems like a fantasy steampunk world in which the King is entertained by songs of his death based on his death prediction. **Blue Fever:** Nice twist with the queen's death. Also, good world-building. I'd read a novel in that world.

**Tetrapod:** Ex-Pats (Americans?) in Japan teaching English. Interesting setup.

**Machine of Death:** A Sorority Party where people guess how someone dies based on the nondescript MOD slip. Twist vice other party stories - it's another dimension from the one we've been reading about. In this one it just seems like a game.

**Monsters of the Deep (or something like that):** Potentially someone is going crazy...we'll see. Continues to be a crazy, nightmare fuel world. The ending did not disappoint.

**...Bus Accident:** Seems like a variation on some of the stories in the last collection where certain deaths have to do to internment camps. What made it different from other internment camp MOD stories was the focus on the developing world and the perfume statement the author was able to make.

**Cancer:** lots of neat and unexpected twists for why a woman keeps getting different readings

**216:** love the motherhood aspect and the mathematical mind aspect. Whoa! Did not see that ending coming!

**Blunt Force from Spouse:** Super depressing story about spousal abuse"

**Meat Eater:** Hilarious parody of a Homeland Security pamphlet to explain MOD testing to a 6 year old

Turned into Delicious Cheeseburger: Meh

"Your choice: choose your own adventure. awesome!"

In battle, alone and soon forgotten: Interesting Tolkienesque world with a MOD. Not a bad ending. I was able to predict it like 80% through the story.

Lake Titicaca: a fun story of kids who brave the machine to prove their bravado

In Sleep: Weird story that maybe takes place in a computer?

Cecille: Neat little story in which the lover is the killer, but it doesn't seem to affect things too much

[french title]: nice ending!"

Not applicable: crazy future, MOD, and time travel"

Peacefully: crazy zombie apocalypse world

Old age: incredibly sad

Furnace: A fun look at a world in which all the future knows about us is that we loved porn.

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## **Raquel says**

This was intense, funny, heartbreaking among many other feelings. A ton of short stories that I wished would have been dragged out for so much longer. Loved this way more than I thought I would!

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## **Jeff Raymond says**

Earlier this summer, I tripped up on the book *Machine of Death*, edited by Ryan North (of *Dinosaur Comics*), short fiction writer Matthew Bennardo, and David Malki! (of *Wondermark*). The book is a massive collection of short stories centered around the same premise: an invention that tells you how you will die. Suddenly, you get a bunch of different takes from a variety of authors on the topic, and there really isn't a bad one in the batch. For such a seemingly limiting topic, there's not too much overlap and there's lot of humor to go along with the darker, more serious stories.

I don't generally like short fiction as a rule, but this had a lot going for it - humor, interesting social commentary, and lots of death. Recently, the sequel, *This is How You Die* came out, and it's chock full of more death.

Where *Machine of Death* succeeded is how well it struck a balance. Every story felt like it could be a realistic take on what a society with a machine that predicts death would be like. In the afterword of *This is How You Die*, North talks about a bit of a struggle with editing the first volume, and the results of those struggles come through somewhat with a second volume that is a little more adventurous and a little less accessible as a result.

Things I liked included the attempt to spread their wings on the concept a bit. There's a Sherlock Holmes tale, there's some alternate histories, some futuristic scenarios, it feels a lot more like a genre piece than a concept piece. There are also some great illustrations to go along with the first book, and I might come right out and say that the illustrations in this one are much better than in the first book.

If I have a complaint, it's that the conceit is far from played out, but the story selection came across as if they *needed* to go into different directions with the concept. I understand the fears of wanting to not act as if the second book was a collection of b-sides or also-rans, but some of the stories fell flat less because they were bad stories, but more because they were stories with a tenuous relationship to the topic that almost felt shoehorned in.

My complaints should not keep anyone away from this book or *Machine of Death*, however. They're both really solid pieces with stories of a good enough length where you can visit regularly and not get tired of anything, and there are still a ton of gems in *This is How You Die* to be a great second volume and companion piece.

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### **Chris Wootton says**

A collection of short stories centered around a common theme: what if a machine could tell you how you will die. The characters many times learn to come to terms with this knowledge and learn to let go of fear and worry. This book helped me find courage in my own life.

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