



Unidentified Funny Objects 5

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From Reader Review Unidentified Funny Objects 5 for online ebook

Chris Bauer says

Alex Shvartsman delivers yet another top-notch collection of humorous speculative fiction gems in "Unidentified Funny Objects #5", continuing the trend he started several years ago.

I've been an avid reader of this anthology since the first one came out and have been impressed by the increasing quality of each tale. While I won't say I was laughing aloud at every story, there were more than enough which kept me grinning the entire time.

Highly recommended for a quick read with plenty of laughs to appeal to a variety of readers.

Some of the standouts (in no particular order) for me were;

- "If I Could Give This Time Machine Zero Stars, I Would" by James Wesley Rogers
 - "The Deliverable" by Shaenon K. Garrity
 - "The Trouble with Hairy" by David Gerrold
 - "Kaylee the Huntress" by Tim Pratt
 - "Best Chef Season Three: Tau Ceti E" by Caroline M. Yoachim
-

Mike says

I have a difficult relationship with funny SFF. As a Commonwealth citizen, I have more of a British than an American sense of humour, and a lot of "funny" SFF isn't necessarily as funny to me as it is to other people. Yet I always want to see more of it in the world.

I also believe that humorous stories should work as stories, even for someone who doesn't find them funny, and that doing some easy mockery of common tropes with a few silly names thrown in is not nearly enough. At the same time, I'm willing to excuse a few weaknesses in a story if it makes me laugh.

This collection runs the gamut, for me, from a few stories I felt didn't work especially well to a number of others that I enjoyed a good deal. I'll go through them one at a time, and give each one its own rating out of 10 and brief commentary. I'm well aware of how subjective humour is, and no doubt the stories which didn't work for me will be someone else's favourites, and vice versa.

7/10 "My Enemy, the Unicorn" (Bill Ferris): cryptids in captivity scheming among themselves and against each other. Twisty enough to be enjoyable for that reason, and also with a trickster protagonist, which is generally a plus for me.

6/10 "The Trouble With Hairy" (David Gerrold): exhibits a fault that I've seen a few times in comedic SFF, which is that it's almost entirely in "tell" mode. There's very little dialog, and while there are some named characters, we're told rather than shown what they do. The story itself, about a "solution" to LA's traffic woes, is absurd, but in mostly a good way, and enjoyably told; but "told" is exactly what it is, and that loses it some points.

7/10 "B.U.M.P. in the Knight" (Esther Friesner): Friesner is one of my favourite American SFF humourists. Her stories mostly play with the tropes, but she does it very well, and this is no exception; princesses and dragons scheme against knights, and come up with a clever solution to a pressing problem.

8/10 "If I Could Give This Time Machine Zero Stars, I Would" (James Wesley Rogers): simultaneously a clever time travel story and an effective parody of online consumer reviews. Either one of those elements could easily have failed (I've seen both done poorly), but in this story, neither one did.

5/10 "The Pi Files" (Laura Resnick): for me, Laura Resnick's pieces can tend to be a bit too much playing with tropes and silly names, and not quite enough fresh, effective story, and this is an example. Trying to cram the X-Files, Doctor Who, Star Wars, Star Trek, 2001, and, for some reason, Casablanca all into one story was probably too much, and left all of the elements underdeveloped. A bit reminiscent of Mad Magazine, because of the silly names, and I never did find that style funny.

8/10 "Prophet Margins" (Zach Shephard): this is an example of a story that works as a story first, and is secondarily funny, and none the worse for that. It's relatively fresh, with worldbuilding I hadn't seen before (different methods of predicting the future), and also charming. The terrible jokes that one of the characters tells are truly awful, but they're supposed to be.

7/10 "The Deliverable" (Shaenon K. Garrity): told in emails, this story parodies startup culture and the multiplication of coffee shops in the San Francisco Bay Area. Parodies of a current phenomenon can easily go sideways, as can the epistolary style, but this one is well executed, bringing out distinct characters who are both individuals and recognisable types, and telling an apocalyptic story in the process. Perhaps had one or two more characters than it strictly needed, because I found myself losing track of them at one point.

7/10 "The Mayoral Stakes" (Mike Resnick): a Runyonesque, one of my personal favourite story styles, with the same main character as the author's story in the Funny Fantasy anthology I reviewed not long ago. I didn't feel that this story was quite as good as that one, somehow; it perhaps would have benefited from a reduction in characters and a bit of streamlining in the first third, but it's still an enjoyable tale of betting on, and manipulating, New York mayoral elections.

6/10 "Rude Mechanicals" (Jody Lynn Nye): works both as a police-procedural murder mystery and an SF story involving aliens and AIs. However, I didn't find it outstandingly funny, and the style was somehow flat for me.

7/10 "Kaylee the Huntress" (Tim Pratt): the thoroughly dislikable protagonist (a spoiled "mean girl" type) lowers the mark I'm giving this one. It's a clever premise - she accidentally becomes a supernatural huntress and has to deal with the consequences - and well written, but I just disliked her so much. Which I was supposed to, but still.

5/10: "Best Chef Season Three: Tau Ceti E" (Caroline M. Yoachim): one kind of "funny" story I tend to dislike is one in which terrible things happen but the tone is kept light, never acknowledging the horror in the slightest. This is one such. That conflict between dark deeds and a light tone just isn't a thing I enjoy much. Other stories in this book have dark deeds, but manage to work for me because they give at least some acknowledgement to how people would really feel about them. The premise of a cooking reality show run by aliens is a fairly obvious one, too, and I didn't feel that the author took it anywhere truly creative.

8/10: "Won't You Please Give One of These Species-Planets a Second Chance?" (Nathan Hillstrom): an amusing mashup of two ideas, "powerful aliens rescue/threaten Earth" and "shelter pet adoption". The

teenager who knows how to manipulate people into adopting pets is wonderful.

7/10: "Fantastic Coverage" (Mitchell Shanklin): something that "funny fantasy" anthologies tend to get a lot of is parodies of aspects, especially frustrating aspects, of contemporary life with a tropish science-fictional or fantastic overlay, and here we have an insurance claims agent whose job is to find loopholes and deny payouts in cases of fantastical disaster. It could easily be weak, but it's well executed and has a fun twist at the end.

7/10: "Mistaken Identity" (Daniel J. Davis): what it's like to be mistakenly targeted by a costumed vigilante. The comedy of errors for the hapless protagonist escalates amusingly.

7/10: "Customer Service Hobgoblin" (Paul R. Hardy): one of the commonest topics for funny fantasy stories is the supernatural helpline, and it's a story idea that is pretty well mined out by this point. Not completely, though, as this story proves, with its trickster protagonist and twisty plot.

6/10: "The Lesser of Two Evils" (Shane Halbach): likewise, the "IT is really magic/demons" idea must be close to getting its retirement gift, giant novelty card and generic congratulatory message from the CEO by now. This story doesn't take it in any startlingly new direction, though it's well enough executed.

7/10: "Appointment at Titlanitza" (Fred Stesney): noir detective with a Mexican setting and an ancient aliens theme. Some absurd moments amused me, which boosted the rating.

5/10: "The Problem with Poofs" (Gini Koch): to me, this stumbled, mostly because unnecessarily large numbers of characters were introduced in batches, meaning that by the time they did anything I'd forgotten which character went with which name. Also, I didn't find it especially funny. The title is an obvious reference to the Star Trek episode "The Trouble with Tribbles," - and, indeed, a lot of the story feels generically Trekkish - but the tribble-like poofs of the title are never actually a problem, only a solution. Otherwise, it's a fairly standard story of human exceptionalism among alien races (which are all unimaginatively based on Earth creatures), with not enough to the plot to rescue it from its other faults. A disappointing close to what was, on average, a good collection.

Disclosures: I received a review copy from the editor, who is an online acquaintance. I also submitted stories to this anthology, and previous UFO anthologies, unsuccessfully.
