

This is my
Funniest 2

LEADING SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS
PRESENT THEIR FUNNIEST STORIES EVER

EDITED BY
Mike Resnick



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Introduction

We always knew that science fiction writers like to laugh. That's why we assembled *This is my Funniest*. Well, now we know something else: science fiction readers like to laugh, too. As a rule, science fiction anthologies, even those with all original stories, sell about a third as well as novels, often even less than that. But *This is my Funniest*, a reprint anthology, outsold every science fiction novel in BenBella's catalog in less than half a year.

So what could we do but bring you *This is my Funniest 2*?

Don't look for the same writers (with one curmudgeonly exception). They already gave you their funniest. But we've got a new batch, just as prestigious, who are happy to share their most hilarious pieces with you. We've got Worldcon Guests of Honor like Gene Wolfe, Greg Bear, and Gregory Benford; *New York Times* bestsellers like Kevin J. Anderson, Mercedes Lackey, Ron Goulart, Larry Niven, and Eric Flint; Hugo and Nebula winners like Michael Bishop, Terry Bisson, Frank M. Robinson, and Jack Dann; and that's not even half the line-up.

You'll get satires, parodies, mock scientific essays, and just out-and-out funny stories, in and out of dialect. We've got novelettes, short stories, and short-shorts. We've got men, we've got women, and we've got at least two writers I suspect of being aliens.

Mostly, what we have is continuing proof that for all the dire predictions and tales of warning they produce, science fiction writers love to

laugh. One of the very nice things about this field is that every editor who has ever worked in it has been willing to buy a well-written humorous story, and sooner or later just about every writer who works in the field has gotten around to producing one (or six, or fifty-three).

Probably it wouldn't hurt to thank Glenn Yeffeth, the publisher of BenBella, for having the guts to okay the first book at all, and the second book so quickly. If he someday decides to green-light *This is my Funniest* numbers 3 through 8, I can promise you one thing: we're not going to run out of authors, and as these first two volumes show, as long as we don't run out of authors we're not going to run out of funny stories.

So why are you still reading this with a straight face? Turn the pages and start chuckling.

—*Mike Resnick*

Never have I figured out the basis for my fascination with 'bots. However, I think I know the source of my preoccupation with food as story material. Firstly, my mother was a first-rate cook and worked for many years as the head cook of my grammar school cafeteria. After I graduated from college I worked, off and on, for a dozen years for a West Coast advertising agency that specialized in food accounts. And I'm married to a lady who, in addition to being a first-rate cook, has written several successful books about cooking and nutrition.

"The Robot Who Came to Dinner" is the third of a series of four about this particular mechanical man that I did for Analog. I recall laughing out loud frequently while writing it and I laughed frequently again when I reread it. Since I abandoned the habit of hyperbole once I left the ad game, I have difficulty labeling this as my funniest story. However, to paraphrase a slogan my old agency coined for its beer account, it's "one of my two great funny stories."

—Ron Goulart

The Robot Who Came to Dinner

Ben—Or at Least One of Him—
Gives New Meaning to the Term “Self-Made Man”!

RON GOULART

*S*he came striding into the robot’s office, fist clenched. “What the hell is going on, Ben?” asked Maggie Quincade, gesturing angrily at the wide oval room with its tinted viewwindows that overlooked the other office towers in this part of the Hollywood Sector of Greater Los Angeles. “Why have you opened a detective agency? Why didn’t you tell me a darn thing about it? And, more importantly, why in the heck have you been harassing Brice Cornwall, who’s a potential client for my advertising agency?”

“*Our* advertising agency,” corrected the big, chrome-plated bot. When he rose up behind his wide neoprene desk, both he and the aluminum swivel chair produced metallic creaks. “And keeping up a discreet surveillance on a suspect isn’t exactly—”

“It’s very difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, for a huge, lumbering, gawky guardbot to be discreet, especially one who persists in going around wearing an overcoat and a beret.”

The robot did have his long dark overcoat on, but the beret was resting on the edge of the desk. “We’ve already discussed the fact, Maggie, that my sense of modesty and yours differ when it—”

“And it isn’t your advertising agency,” the slim, dark-haired young woman told him as she advanced on his desk. “Quincade & Quincade Advertising is owned by me and my ne’er-do-well former husband, Ben Quincade, from whom I have been blissfully divorced for nigh on two

months. He, the more or less flesh-and-blood Ben Quincade, is presently, praise the Lord, running our brand-new branch office in Buenos Aires, whereas you—”

“Why am I in Argentina? I thought I . . . Ben was in charge of the new Brazil office.”

“We landed the Soybeef account last month and you . . . that is, Ben moved to Argentina,” explained Maggie. “Things have been going markedly better since I managed to get that simp shipped out of the country.”

“How come you don’t tell me what I’m up to? I never even knew that he had—”

“You’re merely a robot,” Maggie reminded, resting both fists on the edge of his desk. “Granted, you’re my house guest, but—”

“For all intents and purposes, Mag, I’m Ben Quincade, too,” the robot reminded her. “My brain is a downloaded chip version of his and, if it hadn’t been for a screw-up, that replica brain would be implanted in a top-of-the-line android simulacrum of my original body instead of housed in this bulky guardbot exterior.”

“I know all that,” said Maggie, putting her fists on her hips. “But what I sure don’t know, Ben, is what you’ve been up to these past few weeks. You gave me a line about deciding to take long, thoughtful walks around Greater Los Angeles. Instead you’ve set yourself up in a fly-by-night private-eye business.”

“It isn’t fly-by-night, Maggie,” he assured her. “I took a two-year lease on these tower offices.” The robot, as he settled back into his chair, pointed at the clear plaz door she’d just come pushing through. Etched on it in sedate san serif letters were the words—*The A-1 Detective Agency. Ben Quincade II, CEO.*

“What a dippy name for an investigating service,” the angry young woman observed. “And who’s Ben Quincade the Second?”

He poked his chest with his thumb, producing a small clang. “Me,” he replied. “It helps the public differentiate me from my other self, from the exiled-though-personable human Ben Quincade who is eking out a living in the sweltering jungles of South—”

“What is it you think you’re doing, Ben?”

“Through no fault of my own,” answered the big silvery bot, “I awoke

a few months ago to find myself imprisoned in the body of a crime-busting inclined guardbot. Since then, once I was able to circumvent your efforts to keep me in a coma and packed in a crate, I—”

“Okay, I used to click you off when you weren’t in use,” Maggie admitted, partially settling into a tin guest chair facing his desk. “But the stress of trying to carry on a normal life with a big hulking robot underfoot is sometimes too—”

“Be that as it may,” cut in Ben, “using my native abilities, plus many more clever modifications I’ve been able to add, I’ve become a first-class detective. As you well know, Mag.”

“Okay,” she admitted. “You’ve had a little luck solving mysteries. But keep in mind that on those occasions, you collaborated with *me*. Your forensic inner workings and my intelligence are actually what—”

“Baloney,” said the robot. “I’ve modified myself to the point where I don’t need any help from you or anyone. To prove that, I’ve opened the A-1 Detective Agency and already, in just a matter of weeks, I’ve—”

“What you’ve actually done, dimwit, is screw up the ad agency’s chance to land the Farmstandz account,” she said, scowling. “I’m *that* close to getting Brice Cornwall, the senior vice president of Farmstandz International, to let us handle the advertising agency for the whole darn faux vegetable division. That adds up to 18 percent of an annual billing of 27 million for us, dopey.”

“I know you don’t have all that much by the way of ethics,” said the robot. “I didn’t myself until I modified my conscience hardware so that—”

“Play detective if you must, Ben, but lay off any prospective clients,” said Maggie. “If you annoy Brice any further, he’s going to—”

“Does he know I’ve been investigating him for the past week?”

“No, his security people only tumbled to your snooping yesterday afternoon and . . . a week?” She slumped slightly in her chair, a look of dismay touching her pretty face. “Would that include last Friday afternoon?”

Ben nodded, his neck producing a rusty hinge sound. “I know, alas, what went on at his boathouse in the Malibu Sector.”

“It was nothing much, Ben, really.”

“The footage I was able to siphon from his parlor security camera, Maggie, indicated otherwise.”

“A little smooching is necessary when you’re wooing a new account,

I don't do humor very often. Funny scenes in books sometimes, but comedy is hard. . . . But about the time I was asked to write a humorous story I heard a folk song called "Stray Dog Man" by Bill Sutton, and that gave me the idea. Now both of us start with the notion that an alien pet gets dumped (in my case, lost) and taken in by a very folksy type. And the "pooch" will eat about anything. But that is where our two stories part company; living as I do in rural Oklahoma I have powerful respect for the shrewdness of my neighbors. They like to fool outsiders, but—

Well, see for yourself.

—Mercedes Lackey

Aliens Ate My Pickup

MERCEDES LACKEY

*Z*es'm, I'm serious. Aliens ate my pickup. Only it weren't really aliens, jest one, even though it was my Chevy four-ton, and he was a little bitty feller, not like some Japanese giant thing . . . an' he didn't really eat it, he just kinda chewed it up a little, look, you can see the teeth-marks on the bumper here an' . . .

Oh, start at the beginin'? Well, all right, I guess.

My name? It's Jed, Jed Pryor. I was born an' raised on this farm outside Claremore, been here all my life. Well, 'cept for when I went t' OU.

What? Well, heck fire, sure I graduated!

What? Well, what makes you thank Okies tawk funny?

Degree? You bet I gotta degree! I gotta Batchler in Land Management right there on the wall of m'livingroom and—

Oh, the alien. Yeah, well, it was dark of the moon, middle of this June, when I was out doin' some night-fishin' on m'pond. Stocked it about five years ago with black an' stripy bass, just let 'em be, started fishin' it this year. I'm tellin' you, I got a five-pounder on m'third cast this spring an'—

Right, the alien. Well, I was out there drownin' a coupla lures about midnight, makin' the fish laugh, when—wham!—all of a sudden the sky lights up like Riverparks on Fourth of July. I mean t'tell you, I haven't seen nothin' like that in all my born days! I 'bout thought them sci-fi writers lives over on the next farm had gone an' bought out one'a them fireworks factories in Tennessee again, like they did just before New

Years. Boy howdy, that was a night! I swan, it looked like the sky over ol' Baghdad, let me tell you! Good thing they warned us they was gonna set off some doozies, or—

Right, the night'a them aliens. Well, anyway, the sky lit up, but it was all over in less'n a minute, so I figgered it couldn't be them writers. Now, we get us some weird stuff ev'ry now an' again, y'know, what with MacDac—that's MacDonald-Douglas t'you—bein' right over the county line an' all, well I just figgered they was testin' somethin' that I wasn't supposed t' know about an' I went back t' drownin' worms.

What? Why didn' I think it was a UFO? Ma'am, what makes you thank Okies got hayseeds in their haids? I got a satylite dish on m'front lawn, I watch NASA channel an' PBS an' science shows all the time, an' I got me a subscription t' *Skeptical Inquirer*, an' I ain't never seen nothin' t'make me think there was such a thang as UFOs. Nope, I purely don't believe in 'em. Or I didn't, anyway.

So, like I was sayin' I went back t' murderin' worms an' makin' the bass laugh, an' finally got tired'a bein' the main course fer the skeeters an' chiggers an' headed back home. I fell inta bed an' didn' think nothin' about it till I walked out next mornin'.

An' dang if there ain't a big ol' mess in the middle'a my best hayfield! What? Oh heckfire, ma'am, it was one'a them crop circle things, like on the cover'a that Led Zeppelin record. Purely ruint m'hay. You cain't let hay get flattened down like that, spoils it right quick 'round here if they's been any dew, an' it was plenty damp that mornin'.

How'd I feel? Ma'am, I was hot. I figgered it was them sci-fi writers, foolin' with me; them city folk, they dunno you cain't do that t'hay. But they didn' have no cause t'fool with me like that, we bin pretty good neighbors so far, I even bought their books an' liked 'em pretty much too, 'cept for the stuff 'bout the horses. Ev'body knows a white horse's deaf as a post, like as not, less'n' it's one'a them Lippyzaners. Ain't no horse gonna go read yer mind, or go ridin' through fire an' all like that an'—

Oh, yeah. Well, I got on th' phone, gonna give 'em what for, an' turns out they're gone! One'a them sci-fi conventions. So it cain't be them.

Well, shoot, now I dunno what t'think. That's when I heerd it, under th' porch. Somethin' whimperin', like.

Now y'know what happens when you live out in the country. People

dump their dang-blasted strays all th' time, thinkin' some farmer'll take care of 'em. Then like as not they hook up with one'a the dog packs an' go wild an' start runnin' stock. Well, I guess I gotta soft heart t'match my soft head, I take 'em in, most times. Get 'em fixed, let 'em run th' rabbits outa my garden. Coyotes get 'em sooner or later, but I figger while they're with me, they at least got t'eat and gotta place t'sleep. So I figgered it was 'nother dang stray, an' I better get 'im out from under th' porch 'fore he messes under there an' it starts t'smell.

So I got down on m'hands an' knees like a pure durn fool, an' I whistled an' coaxed, an' carried on like some kinda dim bulb, an' finally that stray come out. But ma'am, what come outa that porch weren't no dog.

It was about the ugliest thing on six legs I ever seen in my life. Ma'am, that critter looked like somebody done beat out a fire on its face with a ugly stick. Looked like five miles a' bad road. Like the reason first cousins hadn't ought t'get married. Two liddle, squinchy eyes that wuz all pupil, nose like a burnt pancake, jaws like a bear-trap. Hide all mangy and patchy, part scales and part fur, an' all of it putrid green. No ears that I could see. Six legs, like I said, an' three tails, two of 'em whippy and ratty, an' one sorta like a club. It drooled, an' its nose ran. Id'a been afraid of it, 'cept it crawled outa there with its three tails 'tween its legs, whimperin' an' wheezin' an' lookin' up at me like it was 'fraid I was gonna beat it. I figgered, hell, poor critter's scarder of me than I am of it—an' if it looks ugly t'me, reckon I must look just's ugly right back.

So I petted it, an' it rolled over on its back an' stuck all six legs in th'air, an' just acted about like any other pup. I went off t' the barn an' got Thang—I ended up callin' it Thang fer's long as I had it—I got Thang a big ol' bowl'a dog food, didn' know what else t'give it. Well, he looked pretty pleased, an' he ate it right up—but then he sicked it right back up, too. I shoulda figgered, I guess, he bein' from someplace else an' all, but it was worth a try.

But 'fore I could try somethin' else, he started off fer m'bushes. I figgered he was gonna use 'em fer the usual—

But heckfire if he didn't munch down m' junipers, an' then sick them up! Boy howdy, was that a mess! Look, you can see the place right there—

Yes'm, I know. I got th' stuff tested later, after it was all over. Chemist

Resnick makes me crazy. He's never willing to accept my word that I'm a songwriter, not a prose writer. He harangued me and harangued me over some ridiculous concept book, finally signing a contract on my behalf and presenting me with the fait accompli deadline. The only way to get back at him was through writing this story. . . .

— Janis Jan

Correspondence with a Breeder

JANIS IAN

1624.12 ABR, MESKLIN

Dear Mister Mike Resnick—

Greetings from the future!?”

You may be appalled to learn that I am writing to you through judicious use of the MicroMac, a privilege rarely granted and more rarely accepted in my universe, and that we will be good friends soon*!&!

My name is Torthan Volbiss, and as part of my Natural History science project I have elected to do research into the lives of great canine breeders of the nineteenth century. I have selected you for my project!*!&!

I am hoping we can communicate via satelnet <trans: Internet transmission> regarding this project, as I am pressed for sunturns <trans: time> and must get this in quickly or my lectern will be degrading me.

Please advise as soon as possible:

1. How many canines have you bred in your past centurns <trans: centuries> ?%\$
2. Of the ones you have bred, which is your best-beloved canine <trans: favorite dog>@#?
3. Have you obtained superiority propogation certificates <trans: best-of-breed> from extra-Sol <trans: any other galaxies> and if so, which planet did you like best?)(
4. If not, why not?!*!

5. Are you accepting applications for lecterns? .#

Sincerely&*(
Torthan Volbiss

1624.17 ABR, WALPURGIS III

Dear Mr. Resnick:

Thank you for correcting my punctuation? I did not realize only one character was needed at the end of each sentence@ I will enterprise with more awareness in future# [That is a joke, *future*, do you acquire it"]

Not being a transtemporality <trans: time travel> major, I cannot explain how the transmissions are effected. I only know that Woz Volbiss III, my great³-paternost <trans: male ancestor> invented a new way to take advantage of the SLF <trans: speed of light factor>, and somehow we are able to scratch heads <trans: communicate> this way*

Not many students are afforded the ability to use the MicroMac, and I must be brief or it will fire electrical charges into my system <trans: shock me>+

I did not realize you are in the twenty-first century* My how instants wing <trans: time flies> is I believe the correct term from your era:

Yes, the word I meant was INTERN* Of course I could not fulfill the mission <trans: job> in soft tissue <trans: in the flesh>, but I could certainly handle your datamail <trans: correspondence> from here\$ To be less-than-sharply-honed <trans: blunt> it would also gain me extra scores, and as the Unicollge program is very competitive this would be of great aid to myself and my domestic unit <trans: family>.

If you have only sixty years how have you managed to attain your Q-factorization <trans: pre-eminence> in the field% Also are you speaking from the side of your mouth <trans: lying> when you say travel to other planets is not possible for the ordinary man= Surely you are anything but ordinary, you are a breeder of some repute even in your era&

Thank you for your attenuation.

Genuinely,
Torthan Volbiss

1624.22 ABR, HEROVIĆ'S WORLD

Dear Mike,

Thank you for tolerating my use of your first name! Also thank you for the language lesson, I will confine myself to ! ? and . .

Are you always so polite to your data-friends. I am impressed that you have answered all sixteen of my packets within one sunturn <trans: day>? You must have a great deal of time on your maniples <trans: hands>, my elucidator says you will be a wonderful mentor for this study. I agree, I can feel it in my skeletal structure <trans: bones>? It is very kind of you to answer my questions?

I am sorry to hear you are no longer breeding canines, although I agree that the invention of dentistry has probably made this unnecessary. My misunderstanding due to lingual problems, I am sure. Sometimes the convertor <trans: translator> does not decode to perfection.

I am sorry I do not share your tongue, but the MicroMac will have to do as yours is a dead tongue. Perhaps eventually we can share tongues and become closer.

What is your habitat <trans: home> like, do you have wives! If so, where are they kept when their mouthpieces <trans: motors/alt trans: lawyers> are turned off. Do you regularly apneate <trans: sleep soundly> in a cama <trans: bed> or a Landsend <trans: hammock>!

I must penitate <trans: confess> that this project did not seem like much fun when it was assigned to me, but I am beginning to enjoy it.

Your new friend,
Friendily,
Torthan V.

1624.29 ABR, DARKOVER

Hi! Mike! How! are! you!

This was a joke as I have been wrestling your era. You said to use only one punctuate! . or ? This was only one for each word.

Are you laughing now. I am?

It is hard to translate humor, for instance I did not understand that your earlier reference to canines and dentistry was a joke. I will endeavor to be more attentive in future/past/present.

It is also difficult for me to understand what you mean by many of your references, since I do not have the scaffolding *<trans: framework>* to compare. Perhaps you could hurl at me *<trans: throw, send>* a story to scan *<trans: read>*! I promise to regard it with open eyes *<trans: an open mind>*?

I am sorry for rushing but I am overdue at ergball *<trans: no possible translation>* and must soar *<trans: fly>*.

Rapidly,
Torthan V.

1624.39 ABR, RAMA III

Dear Mike,

Thank you for your many answers, and the lesson on punctuation. I have reported your educational efforts to my elucidator, who has invited you to give a sermon *<trans: lecture>* here when science permits. This is a very great honor, I am pleased to present it to you!

I did not realize a sentient of your standing was permitted only one wife. Is this by custom or by chance? Also, what do you do when she is worn out? Are there many replacements available?

I am afraid I have not read any of your fiction, it is not encouraged in my family as we are reproduced for science. I am familiar with a writer of your era called Connie Willis, however, as we have elucidated *<trans: studied>* her works in our econosociobiology class. They are not fiction, is that correct!

ABR is standing in for *<trans: short for>* After Bush Resigning or After Bioengineering Replacement or something of the sort. I am not an ancient