There's an App for That: Book 1.0

Ed Toolis
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Lighthearted satire and high-tech devices meet in There's an App for That.

Advances in software and gadgetry are often met with a certain degree of public mania. In the mind of comedy writer Ed Toolis, the conveniences of the smartphone age create a deep vein of absurdity to mine for material. *There's an App for That* takes a satirical look at a phone-happy society.

Toolis's nearly forty short stories read like comedy sketches or sitcom episodes, each taking a fairly normal life situation—talking to teenagers, navigating relationships, commuting to work—and throwing in an app, blog, or social media feature that makes it all go sideways. In some cases, the app itself is silly, but in most instances the humor is found in the public's reaction to the technology and the way it is used.

For example, in "The Blockbuster," a beleaguered but very successful novelist is interviewed before an adoring audience. He has worked to perfect his craft for seventeen years, but his novel is released at the same time as a "find and replace" app that allows readers to switch out key plot elements. His readers are not fans of the original novel but of their own versions of it, be they action adventure, science fiction, or LGBT themed. Readers claim that their personalization of the novelist's story shows their love of his work. The author protests repeatedly and frantically that his readers' actions are not love but instances of intellectual theft. Though there is no such fan-fiction-creating app in real life (yet), the story is both humorous and plausible.

In general, the tone of Toolis's book is light and its satire not particularly harsh, although one story about selling a Facebook-like virtual mausoleum is both biting and insightful. There's an easy, conversational quality to Toolis's voice. In general, the jokes are well timed and the pace never rushed, though sometimes the setup feels a little slow. Still, given that mean-spirited comedy seems de rigueur, *There's an App for That* is refreshing in its lack of reliance on shock value and crass cheapness. Characters are not developed too deeply, but given the sketch comedy setup, that's not crucial.

The layout works well for e-books, with an easy-to-read font and the right balance of text and white space. The cover design, which is reminiscent of a smartphone screen, is not humorous itself, but it suits the subject matter. The book would have felt more complete with an introduction, index, and author bio. Even without these features, however, *There's an App for That* will appeal to those concerned about modern technology.

JASON HENNINGER (August 22, 2014)

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