*The Science of Lost Futures*, by Ryan Habermeyer rev. by Paige Bullock

BOA Editions

*The Science of Lost Futures*, by Ryan Habermeyer and winner of the BOA Short Fiction Prize, is a collection of whimsical short stories that are mysteriously offbeat. In the stories, Habermeyer draws upon the absurdities of folklore and puts his own twist on them with elegant and smart humor.

Each story is central to human curiosity and the mysterious world around the characters. For instance, “Indulgences” portrays a man whose job is to check for defects in a doll. While at work, the man wonders about a yellow button: “I could press the yellow button. It is behind a pane of glass next to the door. Pushing the yellow button sends the signal. What signal? I do not know.” “The Foot,” about a foot washing ashore that becomes the spectacle of the town, also has curiosity and mystery:

“We exchanged speculative hypotheses. Some were fanciful and said it was from a sciapode mentioned in medieval nautical logs. Others suggested when the towers collapsed earlier this month the remains of some victim must have exploded out to sea. A historian among us was convinced it belonged to the Egyptian deity Osiris and we could except more piece to surface.”

Habermeyer consistently creates comical characters, especially in the lead story, “A Cosmonaut’s Guide to Microgravitic Reproduction,” in which the main character is confident to the point of hilarity. At the beginning, the narrator tells us how qualified he is to take on the job as a cosmonaut: “All my life I have been in love with the sky. As a boy I wore a space helmet made out of a cardboard box to the retro science fiction serials playing at the local theater. When I was nine I drafted my first design for a fully-functioning light saber and sent the blueprints to Lockheed Martin. I never heard back, but that didn’t stop me from earning average grades in my high school physics class. I had never heard of the company sponsoring the cosmonaut training, but anyone willing to put a man in the sky was where I wanted to be.” The narrator’s outsized personality makes the story larger than life while still remaining tangible and witty.

Throughout the collection, Habermeyer experiments with multiple elements. For instance, “The Foot” plays with point of view by using the first-person collective; the aforementioned “A Cosmonaut’s Guide” focuses on playful language (“Love is a balloon, my father always said. It carries you away and bursts when you least expect it”), and “Everything You Wanted to Know About Astrophysics but Were Too Afraid to Ask” is arranged as a keynote speech for Stephan Hawking but announced at the beginning that it will be spoken by Oliver Obermann, who is not an expert of the subject matter. The attention to playfulness and artistry not only makes the stories stand out more; it also ties the book together tonally.

Those who have a craving for humor and mystery – which should be all of us! – will enjoy *The Science of Lost Futures*. It is a fun, strange, and zippy collection, easy and wonderful to digest.