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Date Night On Union Station (EarthCent Ambassador Book 1)



Synopsis

"Good SciFi comedy is as rare as hen's teeth. This was a fun read." Kelly Frank is Earth's top diplomat on Union Station, but her job description has always been a bit vague. The pay is horrible and she's in hock up to her ears for her furniture, which is likely to end up in a corridor because she's behind on rent for her room. Sometimes she has to wonder if the career she has put ahead of her personal life for fifteen years is worth it. When Kelly receives a gift subscription to the dating service that's rumored to be powered by the same benevolent artificial intelligence that runs the huge station, she decides to swallow her pride and give it a shot. But as her dates go from bad to worse, she can only hope that the supposedly omniscient AI is planning a happy ending.

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Customer Reviews

After 15 years as acting Earth diplomat on Union Station, a far-flung outpost maintained by the Stryx, the race that rescued humanity from space-faring obscurity, Kelly Frank is tired of her vague

job description, inadequate pay and the ever-present fear of being locked out of her apartment due to ever-increasing debt. With every collect-call from her mother she questions her career decisions. When Kelly is gifted a subscription to the station-run dating service, Eemas, it is a complete surprise that she consents to go through with it, given her luck. But a girl's luck is bound to change at some point— isn't it? Date Night on Union Station follows the trajectories of Kelly and Joe, two unwitting victims of the dating service A.I. who, in addition to their efforts to successfully navigate life far from home, are destined to have some very memorable (that is putting it kindly) blind dates. Date Night on Union Station is a fun, sweet, romantic comedy set in a place that is both alien and yet strangely familiar. E.M. Foner has penned a clever, witty story that is a cozy introduction to the genre for those unfamiliar with science fiction, and a welcome shot of optimism for those who need a vacation from post-apocalyptic angst. If this sounds appealing, follow along while I gush in a brief, non-spoiler fashion while also confronting my hard-to-kill Book Snobbery. I have a long-standing tradition of judging books by their covers. Over many decades it is a quirk that has served me well, which has only served to reinforce the habit. It is poor (by my standards) cover art that has informed a great deal of my prejudice towards self-published books and my tendency to look only to major publishing houses and well-respected small press publishers to meet my genre fiction needs. When I first saw the cover of Date Night on Union Station, my initial impressions were not favorable. Judging solely by the cover, my assumptions tended towards a story about naughty human-robot relations. Those assumptions were wrong. On his webpage, author E.M. Foner writes: "I wrote Date Night on Union Station while taking a break from work on a science fiction epic I've been struggling with for years. The goal was to cheer myself up and to find out if there is still an audience for a science fiction comedy that gets its laughs from dialogue and funny situations rather than from gross-outs and shocks. As many readers have pointed out, the EarthCent series could be rated PG under the old fashioned system, no bloodshed, no graphic sex, no four letter words. And after years of imagining a galaxy for my epic in which multiple human civilizations are at war with each other, it did me a world of good to write about a galaxy where most people are just trying to make a living and find some joy in life." That last phrase is the perfect synopsis of Date Night on Union Station—it is about characters trying to make a living and find some joy in life. I saw this book being discussed by members of an online science fiction book club to which I belong, and it sounded interesting. This is the same group who assigned the original Wool• short story as a weekly selection several years back which prompted me to read, and fall strongly for, the rest of Hugh Howey's novel. The recommendation of these readers and the fact that the book is currently available for free prompted me to give it a try, and

I'm so glad that I did. It grabbed me. I liked Kelly Frank from the very start, and my engagement with her, and with Joe McAllister, and with the peripheral characters of the novel, continued to grow as I read on. *Date Night on Union Station* is a comedy, true, but it is of the witty variety rather than the laugh out loud variety—at least that was my experience (though I did laugh out loud once, prompting my wife to ask what I found so funny). I enjoy the rare farce, but this wasn't one and I was grateful for that. As I read Foner's story I realized that there were elements in his work that were similar to those that I have enjoyed in Alex Scarrow's Ellie Quin series. The characters are a little quirky, and yet easy to relate to, and the author populates his science fiction universe with all sorts of interesting details that make the world fun. Those details reveal a history for the characters and the world they populate. Astute readers will quickly divine the path on which the protagonists tread, and their hopes for both Kelly and Joe will project an assumed outcome for the story. Trust me, that really doesn't take anything away from the story, it actually adds to the story's enjoyment. For along the way both characters will have interesting experiences that not only showcase Foner's sense of humor, but also introduce intriguing information about the Stryx and their relationship towards the people of Earth. One of the more entertaining parts of the story for me was the way in which one of my favorite musicals, *My Fair Lady*, inspires a couple of preadolescent girls to become entrepreneurs. Something about their scheme called to mind the brothers in Robert A. Heinlein's novel, *The Rolling Stones*. As I turned the final virtual page of *Date Night on Union Station*, I had a big smile on my face and a tear in my eye (I really am a sappy reader), for I both enjoyed the story and knew that I could venture further into Foner's world with the next chapter in the *EarthCent* series. Foner writes: "I received so many requests to extend the *Date Night* universe into a series that I put aside my epic for an extended period to write a sequel, *Alien Night on Union Station*. The events take place five years after the conclusion of *Date Night*, and the plot involves a mix of business, diplomacy, gaming and family relations. As a bonus, we finally get to meet Kelly's mother." I do not have any illusions that this experience, any more than my experience with the work of Hugh Howey or Alex Scarrow, will eradicate my prejudices against self-published works and the cover art that brands them as such. It has, however, made me aware of the work of E.M. Foner. And that is a start.

This is a delightful, well-written, engaging read. This the first book in author E.M. Foner's "Union Station" series, with their curious and clever "variations on a theme" covers. The story involves the travails of *EarthCent* diplomat Kelly Frank. *EarthCent* is the autonomous pseudo-government set up

by a species of robotic AI beings, known as the Stryx. After the Stryx discovered Earth and gave humans the technology for interstellar flight, for reasons known only to the Stryx, although they seem to be a good sort with a fondness for taking charity cases under the wings, Earth nations became redundant and in the interstellar reaches, it is the seemingly anarchic EarthCent that represents the interests of humanity, with Stryx support. As the book opens, Kelly is a consul and she is looking for a man, or at least a decent date. Kelly has been given a subscription with the elite, expensive and exclusive Eemiss dating system to see if that situation can be rectified. The dates do not go well, to put it mildly, but, at least, Kelly is able to shine as a diplomat and save the Earth from losing the topsoil of a continent pursuant to a bad contract and put an end to a bride-kidnapping scheme and solve the problem of alien counterfeiting of human trade goods. The book also winds around the similar dating disasters of Joe McAllister, who is having similar luck with his Eemiss subscription. He dropped out of his mercenary life to raise his foster son, Paul, a war orphan Joe found during one of the wars that he was employed to fight. He is generous and decent. Joe does seem like a good guy who deserves a good woman. Will Joe and Kelly meet? Will they find love? Why are the omniscient Stryx such bad matchmakers? You will have to read the book to find out. This book is lightweight and played for an easy-going humor. The insanity of EarthCent's diplomacy and the zaniness of the aliens that Joe and Kelly interact with reminded me of Keith Laumer's Retief stories, albeit Retief didn't seem to have a personal life (or a first name, if I recall.) I found this to be a thoroughly enjoyable diversion and I look forward to future instalments.

I can see that the ratings for "Date Night" kinda jiggle around. We all have differing expectations for the products from an author we hadn't read before. Honestly, my original expectation was not very high. If you have any experience at trying to write comedy, especially with wry introspection?,,,It's damn hard work! However, after reading the first volume of this series, I am very impressed with Foner's writing skills. Frankly, the beginning seemed so-so in plot development. Then, as the major and even the minor characters developed I noticed that I had become engaged in this storyline and the humor was slowly accelerating at a steady pace. Not the usual jerky, hit or miss that too many hack writers bungle at. Through most of the story I remained steadily amused, while the tension builds to a delicious pitch. Finally achieving a hilarious denouement. With Elvis! Who'd have thought? I feel that I can sincerely recommend purchasing this book, And I look forward to reading the rest of the series on Union Station.

I've been reading SciFi since at least 1960. I'm very jaded when it comes to all the new stuff. So it is

with the greatest pleasure that I offer my opinion that this is one heck of a series!! My title refers to a series or novels and short stories by Keith Laumer featuring intrepid Earth diplomat Jaime Retief. Laumer was a bit more tongue in cheek and each story and novel stood on its own, and there was nothing comparable to the Stryx, but the basic "...and a good time was had by a!!..."I've read all ten books and I am eagerly awaiting the release of the 11th. I love the characters and there is a good deal of very thoughtful sci-fi imagination. Frankly, I hope the Stryx really do exist!

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