Clarion Review

Humor

Catastrophically Consequential
Stephen C. Bird
Hysterical Dementia
978-0-615-56663-4
Four Stars (out of Five)

A reader's relationship with books of a distinctive, unconventional, and, dare it be said, eccentric style is often a love-it-or-hate-it affair. *Catastrophically Consequential* is Stephen C. Bird's offering to the genre of books that are difficult to categorize, and it's safe to say that some readers will love it and others will hate it, but few will come away unaffected.

The book is composed of fourteen chapters, the titles of which give some indication of the author's approach, if not exactly what awaits plot-wise. "Incestuous Ingrydd," "Bobby Bluetooth," and "Genevieve Piss Pig" are all characters who inhabit the world of *Catastrophically Consequential*, and while individual chapters focus on one or another, characters cross-pollinate from one story to the next, achieving a cohesive whole.

Bird also wrote *Hideous Exuberance*, a satire, and has read from that book at several venues in New York City. In addition, he has been a writer/performer/producer for several one-man shows. Based on Bird's experience with the spoken word, it follows naturally that *Catastrophically Consequential* should be suffused with that art form's varied patois. In every chapter, Bird shows himself to be playful and inventive with language: within the first few pages there is mention of the Gulf of Mecks-Sicko and a character named Ray-Kill Wraith. The bad guys are either Evilangelists or members of the Tallulah-Ban. Some chapters read as over-the-top satire, others appear closer to reality than they might at first seem. But there is a steady sense of honest outrage and concern for people, not just misanthropic venting. After indulging in one depravity after another, Bird's character Cindy Cipro observes, "I live in a world full of people who wish for what is bad for them; why should I be any different?"

Concealed behind layers of satire, these moments of raw poignancy and social commentary, when discovered, stand out all the more. Bird is also capable of stark and unexpected imagery, as when he ends a chapter with this sentence: "That night Allison dreamt

of a flaming Christmas tree falling off a cliff in the dark and into an abyss."

Bird's humor is trenchant as well, and plentiful throughout the book. But again, it seems the sort of humor that will have some readers laughing at every page and others finishing the book without so much as a giggle.

The major caveat—not necessarily a flaw, per se—about *Catastrophically Consequential* is that there is an abundance of sex and foul language, and a number of scenes that some readers might find disturbing. This is not subtle satire; it is in-your-face confrontation, forcing the reader to either embrace it or push it away.

Stephen C. Bird is a provocateur, and *Catastrophically Consequential* could be described as bold, humorous, raunchy provocation. For readers who enjoy such things, this book is a must-have.

Peter Dabbene