

Halfway to the Stars: Cable Car Tales of a Grumpy Gripman

Daniel Curzon

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This raunchy collection of vignettes turns political incorrectness into an art form.

Exposed and raw—its dark humor seasoned with forbidden monikers and prohibited innuendo—Daniel Curzon's fictional memoir, *Halfway to the Stars*, is a down-and-dirty look at San Francisco from the perspective of a jaded cable car gripman who has the finesse of a two a.m. nightclub performer. A tacky tourist rides along, serving as the audience, while this raunchy comedian bounces from one sordid tale to the next in a collection of vignettes that turns political incorrectness into an art form.

Like a ride on a historic cable car, Curzon's lively writing style creates an illusion of authenticity, leading one to believe his distinctive lead character is real. More than the author's imagination may have inspired some situations depicted, yet his book is a work of fiction. The informal, talkative approach and confidential tone will fool even a sophisticated critic—at least for a time. Pacing is choppy and rapid, but it's done with purpose. Rather than segueing seamlessly from one vignette to the next, Curzon transitions by making sharp turns, adding to the humorous impact by tossing his material in unexpected directions. Dialogue is used judiciously as he develops this eccentric personality in a natural, primarily narrative framework.

An old Chinese man is the target of the gripman's mischievous humor in one scene: "He was ninety-two now, with bad knees, a bad back, two canes, a bald head, false teeth, and a big smile. Unfortunately, he also always had a long nose hair sticking out of his left nostril, and it wasn't a dry hair either."

This is comedy that occasionally crosses established boundaries, going places where no one has gone before—excursions that polite society has been told not to take. Curzon goes there, delighting admirers and likely startling a few with his coarse descriptions and brash analysis.

In this rather tame example, bodily function turns into hilarity: "It was on the floor under a seat in the middle. I picked it up and put it in a plastic bag. I figured that it was a dog turd, but then when I looked at it more carefully, I was sure it was a human one. Now who would shit on a cable car?!"

This eccentric gripman is a fully developed protagonist brought to life by a skilled, award-winning author and playwright. An English professor and a prolific novelist, Daniel Curzon holds a doctorate from Wayne State University.

Halfway to the Stars will thrill an audience seeking entertainment untouched by editorial censors. This is stand-up comedy at its literary best, with controversial pieces included to strike the strongest blow where needed. Race, gender, religion, culture, and sexual orientation are all targets in Curzon's cable car chaos. In this brilliant work, the "equal opportunity offender" theory applies. Only adults should board Curzon's cable car.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (December 17, 2013)

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