

YOU MIGHT FEEL A LITTLE PRICK

BY: Reuben Leder

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You'll Laugh and Cry Your Way Through This Taut Medical Satire.

I think of myself as a relatively funny person (friend, family and professional colleague opinions to the contrary). But when it comes to public speaking, I'll always remember a valuable tip: Never open with a joke unless you are absolutely, positively certain it will be funny. With so many of my "gems" around the house left on the cutting room floor, I always took that advice to heart.

I feel the same way about the books I read that classify themselves as comedies and portend to be funny. It's really hard. Too many times, I find myself politely snickering not so much for the humor but for the place where humor is meant to happen and does not. Valuable tip to authors: Don't write a comedy book unless you are absolutely, positively sure that you are funny.

So when you come across a writer who is truly on your personal comedic wavelength, it's pure delight. Reuben Leder must be absolutely, positively sure of himself: He is a very funny and talented author. You wouldn't necessarily know it from his film and TV credits, which include entertainment titles like *The Incredible Hulk*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Magnum P.I.*, but you can tell instantly from the first pages of his debut novel, *You Might Feel a Little Prick*.

SATIRICAL FICTION INSPIRED BY (MOSTLY) TRUE EVENTS

As funny, fluid and engaging as the writing is, *You Might Feel a Little Prick* is more satirical than a true comedy. The book's PR people describe it as a gory crime comedy and hysterically funny.

You want to laugh – and you do – at the seemingly bumbling capers of the medical team at the fictional Cleveland Mercy Hospital. But there's a dark undercurrent of gore behind Leder's words, and he says the book was "inspired by (mostly) true events." That's pretty devastating once you're into the plot.

"It was more than a story," Leder says. "It was my life; and partly my late wife's life. Some sad stuff there, but the cliché about the fine line between tragedy and comedy is a cliché because it's true."

Leder makes it easy to root for the likable protagonists, Nick Glass and his girlfriend, Dr. Julie Toffoli. And yet, they seem to show up near a lot of dead bodies.

In the story, Nick, a former local baseball hero and current employee for a medical equipment provider, undergoes a spinal fusion. The procedure does not get the intended result – he remains in great pain. In fact, there are questions from a variety of corners whether the surgery was even necessary. Some wonder if doctors and administrators were seeking personal notoriety and fatter financial compensation.

A MEDICAL TEAM BRIMMING WITH BIG PERSONALITIES

As Nick and Julie seek answers to what happened and what went wrong, they are confronted with the typical gobbledygook responses that some medical professionals provide. As they go about their search, their interests shift as much to solving Nick's physical issues as it does to finding the people responsible – and getting even.

Every character Leder introduces is, well, a real character. In particular:

- Dr. Trout: a showman who performs the operation and agrees to have it filmed for a local TV news show. He is as much impressed with his own camera presence as his surgical skills.
- Jimmy Tom Muscat: CEO of medical equipment supplier EZCare (and Nick's boss), an "ex-jock gone to jowl, a bottle-blond alpha dog sniffing at the fire hydrant of his fifth decade." He is a control freak, a manipulator and not particularly politically correct when it comes to people skills.
- Artemas Sikorski: the wise-cracking, about-to-retire homicide detective whose jokes are a bit outdated for his younger colleagues but still has what it takes to recognize clues, get at the truth and leave his profession with a good deed.

Some of the hilarity, in another context and from another writer, might seem downright concerning: a man in a snowman's suit jumping out a top floor hospital window into a bank of snow; Nick scrambling to remember whether he signed the consent form allowing the TV news team into his surgery; and Nick, clearly not totally anesthetized, actually hearing the surgical team discuss his surgery while on the operating table.

POKING FUN WHILE ALSO GIVING CREDIT

While it is easy – and tempting – to laugh your way through this captivating work, Leder's personal experiences provide a discomfiting but important edge to the story. The medical profession and the insurance business are directly in his line of fire. While he has his fun – and is spot-on at communicating it – he makes it clear, in his afterthoughts, that there are many heroes in these fields, and he doesn't mean to lump an entire industry into the farcical situations and attitudes he conveys in his characters.

The author says the book "is a story for anyone – or their loved ones, their friends, or even their worst enemies – anyone who's not been listened to, or undergone an avoidable 'procedure,' that had to be 'tweaked,' or had been screwed over by a health insurance company because the procedure was 'out-of-network' or whatever."

"This is a story about those who have needlessly suffered and want to know what a bit of payback feels like." Reuben Leder is very funny – but his book is much more than one big joke. Hop on for a fun and entertaining ride.

Jim Alkon - Editorial Director, BookTrib.com