

Greyhound Therapy

J. R. Conway

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Well-choreographed combat scenes and exciting dialogue add to this high-octane thriller about the troublemakers who arrive in small town Wyoming via Greyhound.

What do you do with the psychiatric patient who is being released after a seventy-two-hour hold? Or the alleged murderer you don't have room for in your small-town jailhouse? If you're a character in J. R. Conway's chaotic, high-octane thriller, there's only one thing to do: put them on the bus. That's right: buy the troublemaker a one-way ticket to a destination far, far away so he'll be somebody else's problem. All your troubles are solved. Except, of course, that sooner or later a bus will stop in your town and deliver someone else's troubles on your doorstep.

That's just what happens at the beginning of Conway's debut novel, *Greyhound Therapy*. Conway knows the scene well: years of experience in law enforcement and private investigation inform the chaos he inflicts on County Sheriff Craig Spence and his small-town staff. From ruthless killer Albert Brown to mentally unstable nun Patricia, Conway paints iconic portraits of the extreme personalities that come through Spence's office. No doubt drawn from the author's real-life experiences, and clearly meant to deliver a message about the problem of underfunded psychiatric and law enforcement facilities, the characters nonetheless lack realism. Brown particularly so, as his nonstop shooting spree carries him over the Wyoming roads, leaving a trail of violence, but few clues about his motives.

If Brown is the quintessential bad guy, Spence is no doubt the good guy. The book attempts to flesh him out more through the story of his wife's cancer diagnosis, but even that offers only a brief glimpse of what appears to be a perfect marriage. The light character development limits attachment to the story's outcome.

The story itself moves along at a fast clip, and Conway deftly alternates between road chase scenes, violent confrontations, and cutaways to Spence's wife's medical situation. He realistically captures the cadence of law enforcement colleagues' conversations: a combination of urgency, efficiency, and a little dark humor. In this, Conway perhaps reaches too far, though, as when he uses authentic codes to relay radio dialogue; a few instances of "10-4, SO2" create a convincing setting, but repeated use of the convention can be confusing.

The writing is easy to read and moves along just as briskly as the action it's describing. A little more care with punctuation and grammar would help it flow even more smoothly. Conversations and well-choreographed combat scenes move along especially well, and Conway might consider building on this strength. For instance, he could replace some slightly awkward descriptions—such as the frequent reports of characters' exact height and weight—with the dialogue or action scenes that are his forte.

While a longer text might give Conway room for a more nuanced story, *Greyhound Therapy* is satisfying if approached as a quick read, an entertaining escape readers can start and finish on, say, a single bus ride.

SHEILA M. TRASK (September 11, 2014)

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