Clarion Review

Thriller

Train of Consequences
Tom Jarvis
iUniverse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

This modern-day Adventures of Huckleberry Finn *is a thriller that sketches out the world of adolescence with intelligence.*

Part thriller, part coming-of-age novel, this is a powerful exploration of friendship, loyalty, and young people confronting the hard problems of the real world. In *Train of Consequences*, the misadventures of two troubled runaway teens ends in disaster after they meet Dusty Rails, a free-spirited hobo with a fondness for Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*.

Dusty asks the runaways, "Are y'all that disconnected from humanity, boy? Y'all don't think there are good people on this earth still?" Shelton and Richie aren't sure. All they know is that they are in serious trouble. After Shelton's brother dies, his mother and father ignore him as they battle their grief. Richie is on the run because he's certain he's killed his abusive stepfather. Rather than face the consequences, Richie persuades Shelton to head to Mexico with him.

Jarvis's novel has the flavor of a modern-day *Huckleberry Finn*, but there's no big river. There is, however, a purloined cherry-red Camaro and the long highway from New Hampshire toward Mexico. But when the boys are mugged and lose all their money, they meet Dusty, hop a freight, and end up at a Mississippi hobo camp.

Jarvis is superb at sketching out the world of adolescence, a period of life when the spotlight of self-consciousness and self-concern makes navigating the world difficult. Shelton is real. Richie is real. Readers will remember them both from their own childhoods.

The narrative moves quickly, almost a page-turner, with the boys in one scrape after another, and when Jarvis does stop to delve into character or circumstance, he does so with intelligence. For example, when Dusty tutors the boys on how to hop a slow-moving freight, Shelton stumbles, and the author's descriptions of his injury and recovery ring with authenticity.

Jarvis also accurately handles violence and confrontations, such as the mugging in

Connecticut and shootings at the hobo camp. Readers will also appreciate the author's skill at drawing supporting characters, such as with Jim Kerr: "[His] green eyes were bloodshot, and his cheeks had a red tinge to them … black eyebrows formed what looked like a permanent scowl … wearing a soiled white tank top, a pair of green Dockers with grease stains, and scuffed work boots."

The author sketches the boys as young teens, and the nature of his story—that difficult period in life when young people learn that adults are not perfect and that the transition from dependence to self-reliance is painful—would make for an excellent young-adult novel. However, considering the crudity of the language and that one catalyst for the plot is a difficult subject for adults and teens to discuss candidly, *Train of Consequences* no doubt should be read under supervision, by those who might profit most from it—young adults.

Gary Presley