

## Reading Group Guide

### *Buddha Was a Cowboy* by Junior Burke

*A progressive, alternative university is targeted for takeover by conservative forces in this satiric tale, a campus novel for our time.*

Aaron Motherway is a Hollywood screenwriter who, while recovering from a traffic accident, is tapped to run the arts program at Parami University, located in Pearl Handle, Wyoming.

What Aaron doesn't know is that he is being set up to fail by various duplicitous forces, and he finds himself immersed in a culture war infused with sexual misconduct, embezzlement, political opportunism, and potential mass murder, played out in a climate of comedic dysfunction and absurdity.

His charming and able assistant has his back, fending off a demented poet and venomous colleagues. And he gains the loyalty of some very challenged students—a murderer, a lobster wrangler, and an apostate.

But there are surprises in store for Aaron before the story reaches a dramatic conclusion.

*Buddha Was a Cowboy* is a metaphor for many of the issues engulfing and dividing America today, and a darkly humorous take on the current cultural landscape.

*Buddha Was a Cowboy* by Junior Burke is published by Gibson House Press, September 2022. Paperback, \$16.95. 9781948721189. Ebook formats, \$9.99; 9781948721196.

## About the author

**Junior Burke's** *The Cold Last Swim* (Gibson House Press, 2020) was one of five finalists for a Sidewise Award, the annual prize for novels of Alternate History. His short fiction was included in the anthologies *Litscapes: Collected US Writings 2015* and *Collectibles*, published in 2021. He lives Out West.

## Reviews

“Author and songwriter Burke’s . . . portrayal of academic arts administration is both good-natured and razor-sharp. Enthusiastically recommended for fans of Julie Schumacher (*Dear Committee Members; The Shakespeare Requirement*), Jane Smiley (*Moo*), and Tom Perrotta (*Tracy Flick Can’t Win*).” —*Booklist*

“There’s plenty of fun in the language and characterizations, the writing is witty and crisp, shots are fired across the political and religious spectrum, and it’s just farfetched enough to be true.”—  
Christine Watkins

### **Praise for *The Cold Last Swim*:**

“Set in an alternate-timeline version of golden-age Hollywood, it kicks off with James Dean shooting Ronald Reagan during a live TV broadcast in 1954 and gets stranger from there.”—  
*Chicago Reader*

“Entertaining and surprising all the way to the end.”— Alex Cox, director-writer of *Repo Man* and *Sid & Nancy*, and author of *The President and the Provocateur: The Parallel Lives of JFK and Lee Harvey Oswald*

## Conversation starters

1. The Campus Novel is a well-established genre, yet the institution in *Buddha Was a Cowboy* is alternative and unusual. How does that aspect position it regarding other novels set in academia?
2. The main character, Aaron Motherway, has undergone a life-changing accident. Does that and his response to it help make him more sympathetic?
3. Do the themes in *Buddha Was a Cowboy* limit it to a specific setting or do they resonate into the larger contemporary world?
4. Although told in shifting perspectives, does the novel maintain a consistent voice and tone?
5. Did you find the plot to be engaging and surprising?
6. The narrative contains both humor and malevolent behavior. Did you find that they blended effectively or was the contrast too great?
7. Was the ending gratifying, especially that the novel concludes exactly how it begins?