



Anarchy of the Mice

Jeff Bond

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The pulp thriller Anarchy of the Mice is inflected with interesting social commentary.

In Jeff Bond's engrossing novel *Anarchy of the Mice*, an unlikely trio stands against a hacker collective.

In the near future, corruption spreads throughout corporations and the government, prompting a group of idealistic cybercriminals, The Blind Mice, to bring the entire system down. The Blind Mice elude capture by focusing their attacks on companies known for taking advantage of others.

Against the Blind Mice stands Molly, a single mother who struggles to make ends meet as she runs a dying private investigation firm. Then two men from her past appear: Quaid, a former politician, and Durwood, a retired Marine. They recruit Molly to infiltrate The Blind Mice, hoping to bring the group down from within. Operating as Third Chance Enterprises, the three teammates take on too much: their quest spans the globe and leaves them racing in and out of danger.

This first series title features fantastic backstory and camaraderie between its three central characters, whose stories are dynamic. Molly anchors the story most as she balances her duties as a mother with her desire to stop the Blind Mice. She eschews dangerous situations to care for her family, letting her partners shoulder related burdens. She's capable and makes quick decisions that no one can anticipate, especially when she's undercover. There's much depth in the work because of her.

Durwood and Quaid's own stories unfold in quiet moments. Durwood's loyal canine companion, Sue-Ann, showcases the humanity beneath his predilection for violence, and both men work to achieve their goals with a minimum of collateral damage. Characterization also comes through conversations, as with the Blind Mice leader's tendency to launch into sermons to cover up his true motives and incite his followers, and Quaid's stoic and terse additions to conversations. Molly's inexperience and anxiety mean that her words sometimes come out in fast, rambling sentences.

Text messages and off-screen conversations are shared in italics, but missing formatting makes some pages difficult to follow, as when Molly is at home dealing with benign family drama and has a sudden revelation through a text from her partner, a development that is abrupt and seems misplaced. An early scene wherein Piper, the lead Blind Mice hacker, runs for the stairs is more dynamic thanks to its included details, as when "her elbow nicked a bowl of green apples and two tumbled to the carpet."

A jaw-dropping collection of science fiction elements, including a room bursting with mini black holes, shakes up the book's pulp vibe, while the text's focus on the group's attempts at making the world a better place helps to balance it. All is resolved in a neat, hopeful fashion, with the promise of more adventures to come.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (June 15, 2020)

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