



Dear Durwood

Jeff Bond

Jeff Bond Books (Jun 15, 2020)

Softcover \$13.99 (190pp)

978-1-73225-529-6

In the pulp mystery Dear Durwood, a gallant ex-soldier defends a blue-collar town from a legal coup—and finds romance, too.

In Jeff Bond's mystery novel *Dear Durwood*, a hero with a heart of gold throws himself into saving a small town.

Durwood is one-third of a famous freelance group, Third Chance Enterprises. He's taking time off to unwind when a letter arrives from a small Texas town. Its mayor, Carol, hopes that Durwood can step in and save the dying town from a team of lawyers and investment bankers who are vying to acquire its family run industrial plant. Legal and political obstacles aren't Durwood's forte, but he refuses to stand by and let the town go under. With his trusty canine companion Sue-Ann in tow, Durwood digs deeper and deeper into the mire, all while up against the factory's looming shutdown.

In the course of Durwood's solo mission come imaginative references to the Third Chance Enterprises' previous adventures, including a space laser attack and rambunctious cannibals; these stand in contrast to Durwood's current mission while also hinting at his larger adventures. This particular series entry is focused on a more down-to-earth goal, and the fate of the factory hangs over the entire narrative. A new romance between Durwood and Carol humanizes Durwood even as his superhuman combat abilities make him appear larger than life.

Because of a lost love, Durwood is slow to open up to new people; he relies on old friends and throws himself into helping others instead of giving in to his obvious connection to Carol. Carol's dedicated military service and determination to save her town earn Durwood's begrudging respect; this builds into affection, though Durwood worries that his mistakes could impugn Carol's honor.

The town boasts a colorful coterie of characters, chief among them the interesting corporate adversaries who turn its people against themselves. Durwood faces mounting obstacles with the hope of defending the weak. In fight scenes, he pulls punches when he's fighting misguided locals. He eschews cursing and interrupts conversations with cheeky asides. He is forced to break out of jail; he rushes to secure evidence, but loses a verbal sparring match with manipulative lawyers.

The book's precise, chopped sentences and short paragraphs speed between scenes in the countdown to the factory's shutdown. Its sensory descriptions, as of the crumbling mortar in the jail wall, the incessant tapping of a woodpecker, and the visceral hits assaulting Durwood's face, incorporate realistic details. Its conclusion plays off of the romantic tension simmering in Durwood and Carol's relationship and addresses the town's fate in dramatic, and satisfying, fashion. There's ample evidence that Durwood will rejoin his old team for future adventures; his solo outing contributes to their legacy well, and is a fantastic entry point for the series.

In the pulp mystery *Dear Durwood*, a gallant ex-soldier defends a blue-collar town from a legal coup—and finds romance, too.

JOHN M. MURRAY (August 20, 2020)

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