

Drink with the Devil

David Woods

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An uncommon mix of Little House on the Prairie and The Sopranos, this unique thriller grabs both ends of the moral spectrum.

This romantic thriller edges into the crime genre with a sordid look at vindictive undermining and lack of integrity. Set during the socially charged 1960s in rural England, a decent but downtrodden man loses a woman he adores when he is accused of murder. What begins as a touching love story catapults into a high-stakes fight for justice as this hero, who was orphaned as a child and remains a gentle loner at heart, must defend his legal rights and clear his dirtied reputation.

Protagonist Jim Grainger fights off a gang as they murder his lover's parents, killing one of the assailants in the process. After a stint in prison, he tries to move on with his life, but an enemy close to everything he holds dear is determined to make him pay—over and over again. Obsessed and retaliatory, Jim's nemesis pursues him unrelentingly; he's organized and methodical, even scrutinizing legal documents to plan another method of attack: "Weak little men, how I hate them, he thought. He settled back in his comfortable chair and thought about his next move, but no inspiration came so he read the investigator's report again, this time taking in all the details."

Built on an interesting, somewhat far-fetched premise, this plot extends the bounds of credibility into an unbelievable zone of chaos. Gang activity and revenge-inspired hatred may be a gritty aspect of our dysfunctional society, yet the long-term extent of this insane quest places Jim into situations that do not flow naturally.

The main romance takes a backseat in this book. For prolonged periods, the focus is on Jim's horrible position as he acquires the courage and stamina to disengage from a living hell while his girlfriend dates another man. Any disappointment associated with the lack of anticipated love scenes, however, is compensated by well-executed action involving antagonists who are intent on destruction. Though their purpose is clear, somewhat old-fashioned villain portrayals take the place of fully drawn personalities.

An uncommon mix of *Little House on the Prairie* and *The Sopranos*, this unique thriller grabs both ends of the moral spectrum and manages to create a dangerous mess in a farming community during a decade when off-the-wall anything was the norm. In this scene, the threat is audacious as a group of gang members approaches the building where Jim hides: "Jim shuddered when he saw eight grim-faced men get out, all carrying cudgels."

Written with straightforward precision, this work emphasizes the stalking of, and the clandestine plotting against, the protagonist over the spontaneous flow of human interaction. Author David Woods has laid a lethal trap, strategically implemented for maximum trouble, for his central character. Visual and action-oriented as opposed to introspective, Woods's writing sustains incredible conflict that could not be depicted in a contemplative novel, adding page-turning interest but detracting from inner development.

A resident of West Sussex, England, Woods has incorporated his knowledge of building construction and farm

operations into this realistic novel. *Drink with the Devil* is his fiction debut.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (December 12, 2013)

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