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TITLE INFORMATION

FOREVER SHERIFF

Edward Massey
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BOOK REVIEW

A young lawman comes of age in a changing West in this third installment of the High Mountain Sheriff fiction series.

Summit County, Utah, 1905. When 18-year-old Mark Willford Simms is sworn in as deputy sheriff, he's following a family tradition. His father, John, is the current sheriff, and his grandfather was sheriff before that. There's a shooting on Mark's very first day on the job. A new ranch hand in the area, Tom Hixson, shoots a boy working for a local cattle company owned by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mark soon suspects that one of the local ranchers has set up a meatpacking business in order to hide the fact that he's rustling cows, and Hixson is at the center of the operation. Years later, when Hixson drowns under mysterious circumstances, Mark can't help but wonder if there isn't more to the story. By this point, World War I has come and gone, and Summit County is plagued by more than the meatpackers and their muscle: The nation is in the grip of the Spanish flu. Mark, who has ascended to sheriff following the death of his father, is tasked with leading the county through quarantines and elections. Soon, he's also got a murderer to bring to justice. All of this gets him thinking: Just how long will Summit County need a Simms to enforce the law? Massey's prose is as stoic as his characters, as in this description of the town's longtime liveryman-turned-mechanic: "Old Seth Parker had gone from fixing wagon axles and feeding horses to fixing transmissions and selling gasoline. Like all men in the community, he went about it without comment. When he decided to learn something new, he made no show of it. He made every effort to hide it. Something sinful lay at the center of being imperfect." The novel spans two decades, and more than any particular conflict, its focus is on the closing of a certain period in the history of the Old West. Fans of the genre will enjoy the pensive precision of the author's coming-of-age tale as well as its echoes of modern tensions in the spheres of law enforcement and pandemic management.

A slow-burning, engrossing, quietly philosophical Western.

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