

## Ace

**Steve Williams**

CreateSpace (June 2015)

Softcover (354pp)

978-1-5116-3592-9

*Well-drawn characters are the highlights of this top-notch, entertaining thriller.*

Detectives Sal Mitchell and Eddie Sandovan are back in Steve Williams's most recent mystery, *Ace*. This time they've got a murder that wraps up just a little too neatly and, unbeknownst to them, a revenge-driven gang leader hunting them down. With well-drawn and complex characters, Williams weaves together multiple story lines in this taut, smart thriller.

Responding to gunfire while on a golfing vacation in Arizona, Mitchell and Sandovan end up killing two gang members, one the brother of local gang leader Falco Pelzón. Fearing repercussions from Falco, local law enforcement sends the two detectives home on the next flight. Back at the Eighth Precinct, Mitchell and Sandovan pick up what appears to be a straightforward case: Courtney Francis walks into Finn Casborne's office at one of his car dealerships, shoots him ten times, and then walks out again a few minutes later. Francis herself doesn't dispute the claim. But there's something that doesn't quite add up for Mitchell and Sandovan, who begin to discover more twists to the case. Meanwhile, Falco wants revenge, even if it means driving across the country with Gazzaro, one of his lieutenants, in order to personally kill the two cops who shot his brother.

Williams has written a top-notch and entertaining story. With short chapters alternating between the perspectives of Falco, Mitchell, Gazzaro, and Mitchell's girlfriend, Mya, the story moves along at a quick clip. Although the story follows several plot threads, it never drags or loses focus.

The characters are the highlight of this story. Falco is no stereotypical bad guy; his backstory unfolds as he drives across the country. Although his methods may be brutal, the actions he takes on his road trip end up being oddly beneficial to society, including helping the owners of small diner. Parallels are also set up initially between Mitchell and Falco, both giving remarkably similar statements about their views of death and killing.

The well-drawn characters aren't limited to the major players; even minor characters are interesting and unique. While Williams is excellent at slowly revealing characterization, he is equally adept at one-sentence descriptors. Everything needed to understand Casborne can be summed up in the description of a "'Salesman of the Century' crystal cup behind him—a gaudy trophy he'd had custom made for himself." Also incredibly refreshing is the inclusion of many female characters—from shit-talking mechanics to waitresses to ad executives to government officials—and many LGBT characters.

The writing itself is replete with a sarcastic, dry sense of humor. The unique metaphors are spot on: "They heard the sound of fast-flicking computer keys. It sounded like a flamenco dancer on an espresso bender" and "Something else was nagging at Mitchell's brain. ... The more he tried to figure out what it was, the more it evaded him, like a helium balloon that had slipped its string and kept bouncing along the ceiling, just out of reach."

Though this book can be read as a stand-alone, there are nods to the earlier books in the series. Mystery and thriller

fans who enjoy smart, drily witty stories will love Ace and will likely chase down the prequels while awaiting Williams's next book in the series.

ALLYCE AMIDON (June 5, 2015)

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