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GENERAL

On the Hole
Jeff Bacot
Outskirts Press
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Many things can happen when two good friends spend a day on the golf course, but criminal activity isn't usually among them. In *On the Hole*, Jay Hewitt and Nick Landers seem headed for a fun, uneventful day on the course at the Regina Buck & Duck Hunt Club, but a series of encounters with some mysterious strangers keep interrupting their thoughts and game.

Jay, a single, fun-loving music executive, is the complete opposite of Nick, a married, work-stressed tax lawyer, who is frequently distracted by phone calls from a client mixed-up in business deals with the mob. As they advance from hole to hole, their conversations cover a wide range of topics, including marriage, college memories, work, and, of course, golf: "The score in the end is secondary to all those magical details that make up the whole experience. Friendship, the outdoors, booze, laughs, anger, a bad shot, a good shot. Sitting in a golf cart tooling down the fairway saying and doing; nothing."

Throughout the day, the pair observes a rude, grumpy old couple whose actions seem out of place on the course. Jay and Nick also befriend a new club member whose story of teaching his young son about golf will prove to be a fateful charade. Along the way, they have some suspenseful, life-threatening run-ins with mobsters, the FBI, and hostile homeowners.

On the Hole's strength lies in author Jeff Bacot's ability to create believable, fully developed main characters who engage in the types of conversations that will be familiar to anyone who spends a lot of time with a close friend. No topic is off limits. They joke around and have heated arguments, but their bonds of friendship always shine through. The supporting characters are used effectively, and each one appropriately adds value to the movement of the story line. Bacot's clever use of matching chapter and hole numbers—chapter 1 correlates to hole 1 and so on—helps the reader stay in the flow of the action.

The primary weakness of the story is Bacot's reliance on overused fiction elements. For instance, the main dramatic tension centers on the mob, and Jay falls in love with the lowly barmaid. While the scenes on the course are very realistic and natural, some of the action

portions are almost cartoonish. But these flaws certainly do not overpower the book's strengths.

Bacot delivers an entertaining novel that will appeal to golfers and anyone interested in a solid, thought-provoking story about friendship. With *On the Hole*, the author sinks the winning putt.

Jeff Friend