

The Aspen Account

Bryan Devore

Bryan Devore (February 2012)

Softcover \$9.99 (407pp)

978-0-9852413-0-8

Heroes in modern mystery novels come in a variety of packages, including dashing handsome spies and crime-fighting lawyers. In Bryan Devore's first novel, *The Aspen Account*, the hero is a certified public accountant named Michael Chapman who zips around Denver in his silver Audi and carries his computer slung over his shoulder at a rakish angle. He also deftly maneuvers his way through the Denver club scene and the Aspen ski trails. Michael is no James Bond, but Devore portrays him with enough panache to keep the pages turning.

Michael is a senior staff accountant at a large Denver accounting firm, and he also works as an undercover investigator who searches out corporate fraud for the US Department of the Treasury. When his friend and fellow auditor, Kurt Matthews, is killed in a suspicious skiing accident, Michael is assigned to take over his dead friend's auditing work at X-Tronic, a large computer software firm. Michael aligns himself with Sarah Matthews, a budding investigative reporter for the *Denver Post* who happens to be Kurt's sister. With Sarah's help, Michael follows the trail left by Kurt, uncovers massive corporate fraud, and, in the end, emerges victorious over the forces of evil. Devore's tale is a bit melodramatic, but it is an engaging mystery story.

The author's writing style is fluid and easy to follow, but it is marred by some repetitious content. For example, Devore repeatedly describes the eyes of characters at critical moments. In one instance, he writes that "the stillness of this beautiful, solitary place only seemed to heighten the sense that behind those kind gray eyes lay information that would forever change Michael's life." In another, he notes that "she held his stare with gleaming eyes, showing a strength and independence that would not back down."

The author is adept at portraying a sense of place. His descriptions of Denver, the cold and snow of the mountains, and the manner in which the people of Colorado inhabit such a climate bring the region into full relief. It is as if the geography is a subtle but essential character in the story.

In terms of human characters, however, Devore is a minimalist in his portrayals. By the end of the story, the reader does not know enough about Michael to make him a fully realized character, and Sarah, the reporter, fades from the narrative just as her part in the mystery blossoms, which is unfortunate because the story would have benefited from greater detail about her role in the action.

As in a thorough audit, the essential conflicts in *The Aspen Account* are resolved. The fascination is in the telling of how those conflicts play out. It is an enjoyable read, and Devore should be pleased with his first published novel.

JOHN MICHAEL SENGEL (June 19, 2012)

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