

West of Sin: A Thriller

Wesley S. Lewis

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The lives of Las Vegas convention goers, perky prostitutes, casino gangsters, a firearms instructor, and a brothel owner converge in Wesley S. Lewis's deadly, nonstop suspense debut, *West of Sin*.

New Wave, a Dallas-based real estate company, holds its annual convention in Las Vegas. This year, Jennifer hopes to develop a full-fledged romance with her newly divorced boss, Bryan, but instead finds him with another woman. Seething, she jumps in a rental car and drives directionless into the Vegas desert.

Lost and needing caffeine to endure the night's turmoil, Jennifer pulls into a truck stop. She's confronted by three gun-wielding criminals who're trying to steal an ATM machine. Crocker, another unwitting customer and an armed firearms instructor, kills the crooks, who happen to be henchmen for Vladimir Dudka, a Russian gangster, casino owner, and human trafficker.

Fearing Dudka's reprisal, Jennifer and Crocker escape to a brothel and are befriended by its owner and two twenty-something prostitutes. Imminent danger looms when Bryan is murdered and Jennifer's coworker, Ashley, is kidnapped. The fresh friends concoct a shrewd ruse to rescue Ashley before she's trafficked, luring them into an epic, perilous fight to survive Dudka and his hit squad.

West of Sin blazes with page-turning tension, wit, exceptional dialogue, and affable characters. Its twisting plot is entertaining, if some of its in-the-nick-of-time resolutions feel forced. Despite flying bullets, beatings, abductions, and betrayals, romance finds its way in, and it's a pleasing and effective balm. Distinct depictions of Vegas's culture and landscape are as foundational to the novel's atmosphere as is the violence perpetrated by both the villains and heroes.

As it zips toward its bittersweet, sequel-ready conclusion, *West of Sin* affirms that unlikely friendships can emerge in the most improbable situations.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (January / February 2020)

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