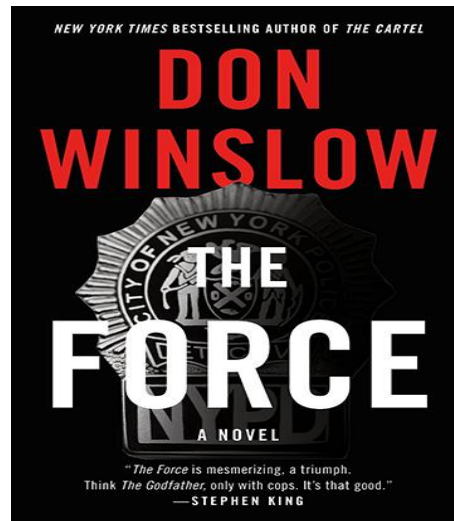


# COPS AND ROBBERS



Don Winslow gives an impressive rendition of the criminal cop story in his crime novel *The Force*. Taking place in a fictional version of modern day New York City, *The Force* is a story that revolves around brotherhood, ethics, and the boundaries of law enforcement. The role of protagonist is played by Detective Dennis “Denny” Malone, a morally questionable veteran cop, who polices out of Manhattan North. Malone, who narrates the story through a combination of monologue and third-person omniscience, leads a team of elite NYPD detectives who belong to a special task force within the NYPD. The novel centers around the morally bankrupt actions of the team, with Malone being the focal point.

**“Malone knows Billy ain’t gonna cut and run, ain’t gonna freeze or hesitate to pull the trigger, if he needs to. If anything, it’s the opposite---Billy might be a little too quick to go. Got that Irish temper along with the Kennedy good looks.”**

A large part of the early portion of the book is used to flesh out how Malone views himself as a cop and how he thinks everyone else views cops. Some of this section highlights the injustice in police shootings and their aftermaths, and in a book about a cop that is appreciated. Other parts of this section try to humanize the actions of cops who act in pretty animalistic ways. That’s a no for me. This is genuinely one of the few parts of the book I have a real problem with. If you’re a person of color, or simply a person who understands the plight of people of color, the early part of the book requires some patience.

Winslow makes the characters as authentic as possible, with their speech and accents so close to New York City cops that I feel like I’m walking past a squad car back home in Brooklyn. There isn’t a character that sounds out of place in the novel and this is much to Winslow’s credit, and his extensive research on the topic of cops. In particular, Winslow highlights the prominent Irish and Italian heritage found in the NYPD, with the members of Malone’s team being one or the other.

Winslow's writing style can also be gleaned from both the dialogue and the narration. Malone's inner monologues drive the story forward, revealing parts of the character that almost elicit sympathy. *Almost* elicit sympathy.

Malone is the worst kind of cop, the kind who will always confirm the fears people have of law enforcement. Malone is goddamn dirty. Winslow does a stand-up job of making his protagonist fairly unlikeable. *The Force* presents a behind-the-scenes cop world that we all know about but would rather not acknowledge. And that's a problem. I've always looked at crime fiction as an artistic reflection of the meaner parts of society.

You can find the Force here:

<http://www.riversendbookstore.com>

Publisher: William Morrow & Company

Pages: 496

Price: \$27.99 (Hardcover)

The novel is not afraid to touch on the NYPD's proverbial dirty laundry with past real-life cases of police brutality and cop shootings mentioned throughout the novel. None of these past atrocities seem to bother Malone much though, and he shrugs them off with a callous indifference that defines his character. *If it's not you and yours...who cares?* But it is him and his teammates that are doing the bad and he just doesn't see the damage done.

One thing that I have to make a point about is the juxtaposition that Winslow imposes on Malone in regard to his treatment of race. Malone has some of the most racist lines in the entire novel. His dialogue is littered with racist taunts and names. I found myself feeling uncomfortable because I thought back to the acknowledgments page where Winslow thanks the countless cops who helped him with fact checking and research.

This means that to the best of Winslow's knowledge this manner of speech is normal for real-life cops. This was juxtaposed with Malone's love of rap music and his love of his Black mistress. I don't like the attempt at the "I'm not that racist because..." argument. I found this aspect of the story distasteful and angering even. I think that the intending effect was to have Malone seem like a tortured soul, but it did little to convey this.

**"So you got Black Lives Matter up your ass, every citizen a journalist with a cell-phone camera at the ready, and you go to work each day with the whole world thinking you're a murdering racist."**

Malone's inner thoughts show a man who has crossed that moral no-go zone a long time ago. It is both a book for those who hold law enforcement in high esteem and for those who don't. You'll read this novel and while you probably won't pity Malone or cops like him, you will come to loathe the failings of the American justice system even more than you already did. And if you didn't, prepare to be swayed.

Winslow does a great job of portraying his characters realistically. They do some good, and they do even more bad. They're undeniably human and that is a good thing. While I didn't find myself having a favorite character in the novel I can say that I liked the few clean cops portrayed in the series. They were often portrayed as annoying or pretentious, but this is only because they were not morally bankrupt, which wasn't true of most of the characters in the novel.

For me, the characterization in the story helped to expose the rotten thinking that Malone used to navigate his job. You come to understand that Malone's thinking isn't unique to him, but that many in his profession share this way of thinking. That is scary. It is also unfortunate. This kind of thinking helps to establish the motif of the story: cops and robbers.

Cops and robbers. That's the best way to articulate the novel's motif. The cops are in fact the robbers in the story. They rob everything, money, drugs, the trust of the public. As readers, we are greeted with the kind of cops that departments and staunch supporters of law enforcement claim don't exist. It was refreshing to read a story this gritty and dark.

This book is similar to Winslow's other works *Power of the Dog* and *The Cartel* because they all have morally wishy-washy law enforcement officers for protagonists. If TV is more your thing, then I would suggest the show *The Shield* as a kindred work of fiction to Winslow's *The Force*. They are eerily similar; so much that as I read Malone's dialogue and narration I read it in the voice of *The Shield* main character Vic Mackey, played by Michael Chiklis. You will enjoy reading this book if you are looking for a muddier account of policing, if you enjoy cop dramas, or if you just want a great story about human flaws.

I enjoyed reading the novel, but this was only after reading more than half-way through. The novel has an ample amount of action and intrigue, which helps move it along when it has "slow moments"; and it does have a few of them. Once you've read a good deal of the novel, the latter stages of the book won't really be a surprise, but they will be entertaining and somewhat rewarding. The story of Dennis Malone is also one part of the American justice system's story; Malone is three parts crook, and one part cop.

The cops are the robbers and everyone pays for it.

*Keshawn Mashore is a fight sport enthusiast with dreams of authoring works of great fiction. He hails from Brooklyn, NY and wants the world to know that the dominant narrative isn't the only narrative that matters. /*