

Maracaibo by James A Ciullo

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Reviewed by Karen Treanor, New Mystery Reader

If you read and enjoyed “Orinoco”, you’ll be happy to see the return of the Independent Senator from Vermont, Joe LaCarta. (I’m still grappling with the idea that anyone could get elected to the senate as an independent, but if it could happen anywhere, Vermont’s the state that would do it.)

Joe and Jimmy Ray Hobson, a conservative Republican senator, have been sent to Venezuela by the President, who wants to make nice with *El Presidente* in order to assure the future supply of oil to the USA. They have barely touched down when their flimsily-guarded motorcade is attacked, Hobson is killed and Joe is kidnapped.

Back in the USA there are people who would prefer that Joe remains missing in order to justify a reprisal raid against the oil-rich state. The Vice President, a devious and power-hungry man, has managed to take charge of what seems to be an international crisis. The media is whipping up a storm of angry half-baked public opinion, and it looks as if the Venezuelan president’s days in office are numbered.

Not everyone accepts things at face value, however: Joe’s wife and his friend TJ begin to suspect there’s more going on than has been made public. Then Marielena Morales, daughter of another old friend, and now a CIA operative in Venezuela, makes contact. She and Sergio Veneto, an undercover policeman, have been involved in a shootout with some very bad men who have apparently been told to get rid of Marielena. It suits her to be thought dead for a while, so she plants some misleading evidence and takes off into the hinterlands with Sergio.

“Meanwhile, back at the secret hideout,” Joe is having a rough time at the hands of his captors, and hoping for a miracle. He half gets his wish when Marielena and Sergio turn up in the middle of another shoot-out, but then all three of them are on the run, on the wrong side of a border that may not have any right side, and not only trying to escape their enemies, but also those who purport to be their friends.

Like its predecessor “Orinoco” this book could have used some more stringent editing to prune clichés and select more appropriate verbs—why would a healthy, mature woman ‘shuffle’ to the window if only six lines later she ‘quickstepped’ out the back door? That quibble aside, this is a fast-moving story into which author Ciullo has woven some unexpected strands of domestic and

international political intrigue alongside the age-old themes of greed and the desire for power.