

Orinoco (Five Star Mystery Series)

James A. Ciullo

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Reviewed by Joe Graham for Reader Views (4/07)

Three Peace Corps friends, Jose (Joe), Pedro (Pete) and Pancho (Francisco), while serving in Venezuela, hear about a six-million-dollar shipment of looted Nazi art from Europe that is in Venezuela on the way to Argentina. They are convinced by an American contractor, Don Buchanan, to help him liberate the loot and then sell it and with their proceeds they can set up a fund that will keep the programs going that they have started in Venezuela even after they after left Venezuela to return home to the United States. The friends plan to take none of the money, but to give all the money to those Peace Corps programs. The three friends and Don manage to pull off the heist with a few complications and they think they have gotten away with the crime until 25 years later when Joe LaCarta (Jose) decides to run for the U.S. Senate, and then, the sins of the past return to haunt the three friends.

This is the heady mix that Ciullo brings to his readers. In a fast fun read, he gives the reader a story that runs from the steamy tropical settings of Venezuela to the more settled towns of Vermont with some stops in Mexico and Washington. The plot revolves around the heist of 25 years ago, but it takes on a more topical slant as mysterious forces that may be the revengeful Nazis, or powerful drug interests or other powerful interests try to block Joe LaCarta's progressive views from coming to the U.S. Senate. At times the book almost seems to be based in fact as most Americans feel that powerful interests who do not have the best interests of the American people if not in actual control of the government often exert too much influence on the government.

The book is a quick-paced page turner, and like any good mystery, it is filled with twists and turns that keep the reader quickly reading until the final ending. And, of course, besides the three former Peace Corp volunteers whose lives are at risk, Ciullo has not one, but possibly three, ladies who are in danger. The use of Peace Corps volunteers as main characters is interesting and gives the reader an insight into the lives of those men and women who answered President Kennedy's call to give something back to the world by entering the Peace Corps. The Nazis and shadowy figures operating inside the government or with the permission of the government as the villains of the story makes perfect sense for the reader as Nazis are always convenient villains and most people have a certain paranoia about the actions of the government in these troubled times. I would recommend "Orinoco" to any mystery fan who is looking for a fun, fast read that may just make you stop and think a little and wonder if there is maybe a grain of truth somewhere in the tale.